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March 9, 2009

Honorable Sheldon Silver  
Speaker  
New York State Assembly  
Albany, NY 12248

Honorable Malcolm Smith  
Majority Leader  
New York State Senate  
Albany, NY 12247

Dear Speaker Silver and Majority Leader Smith:

You have each put out a call for ideas on how to deal with the grave fiscal challenge facing our mass transit system. I applaud your willingness to consider new ideas to help the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) succeed. For too long the MTA has been the ultimate case study for the dangers of inefficient and unaccountable bureaucracies. For too long our approach to mass transit has been to raise taxes on middle class and working New Yorkers in place of making tough choices about how to improve the system.

Today, I am focused in Washington working on the enormous economic challenges faced by our country, and trying to help New York City via the recovery legislation and other available means. My colleagues in the New York Congressional Delegation and I have been able to deliver billions of dollars to fund MTA Transit capital projects. It is hard not to observe the plight of the MTA, and the work that will be done on this issue, and not see that federal support needs to be accompanied by local reforms. I hope you will accept this letter and potential plan as a contribution to our joint efforts to help the transit system at this time of economic peril.

The time has come for a sober discussion about how to create a plan for the MTA that is sustainable and affordable. We need a plan that transforms the MTA from a perennial problem, to an emblem of a forward-looking, 21st century New York City. I wish to offer a four-part plan that I believe embraces a new approach to public transportation in New York City. My plan addresses the endemic problems that plague the MTA without heaping new taxes on middle class New Yorkers who have felt the strain of a weakening economy. My plan targets the waste and lack of transparency that cause and

compound the MTA's many problems. Finally, my plan takes head on the injustice of state control over the City's transit infrastructure.

I therefore offer the following four-part plan that I believe protects New York City's middle class residents and takes concrete steps to restore the footing of the MTA.

1. **End Waste by Cutting MTA Overhead 10 Percent a Year for Four Years.** We need an efficient and accountable MTA that uses taxpayer funds to improve transportation for everyone. The Ravitch Commission is to be commended for their hard work over the last six months, but the plan contained no efficiency savings or cuts to the administration of the agency. Despite the fact that many observers have questioned the need for vast real estate holdings and an organizational structure that is bloated, no real discussion has occurred about reducing the parts of the agency that are luxuries in these times of need. There are over five thousand administrators at the MTA and while their current financial plan actually has that growing between 2009 and 2010, it is time to do more with less. While it is very difficult to truly ascertain the depth of the MTA's administrative costs (see proposal 4 below), by cutting administration 10% a year, it is estimated that this proposal could save taxpayers as much as \$137 million in its first year and permanently reduce overhead at the agency by \$471 million by 2012.
2. **Sensible Tolls on the East River and Harlem River Bridges Limited to Non-New York City Residents.** A smart tolling plan will reflect the important service New York's bridges provide to millions of commuters without heaping another tax on New York's struggling middle class and those struggling to make it. These folks have already borne a very heavy burden in recent years. They have suffered a dramatic rise in property taxes, a spike in water taxes and increase in punitive fines and fees. They should not be the first target in a "heads I win, tails you lose" choice between a car travel tax and a slashing of subway and bus service coupled with fare increases. A \$4.15 toll on the East River and Harlem River bridges on non New York City residents would raise an estimated \$391 million a year. This would be a nearly exact replacement for the commuter tax that was eliminated in 1999.
3. **Give Control of the MTA to New York City.** Virtually all of the passengers on the system either live in New York City or are commuting to New York City and have an impact on our city. New Yorkers have the right to make decisions about the transportation system that travels on their roads and beneath their homes. Yet the unelected MTA board has a membership that gives minority status to the New York City representatives. As part of any reform plan, this must change. By adding 4 additional votes appointed by the Mayor, giving the Governor 2 fewer votes and the surrounding counties 3 fewer votes, we can provide the City with greater control over the MTA.
4. **Make the MTA Transparent and Accountable by Opening Its Books.** We need an efficient, accountable and transparent MTA that responds to the needs of the millions of commuters who rely on public transportation. In order to help find savings and


efficiencies and to restore public confidence in an agency that seems to swing wildly from public statements about surpluses to dire predictions of deficits, there needs to be 100% transparency about how the agency is spending its money. Periodic audits are fine. But we need a culture of openness that begins with every budget document at the MTA being posted on-line in a manner that lends itself to public input. Every dollar should be contained in a digitized, searchable form. Not only will this produce a more honest discussion of the fiscal situation at the agency but it would also foster thousands of citizens who would participate in open government management of what has until now been an unresponsive and opaque one.

I believe this plan will do two things. First, it will solve what amounts to a fiscal crisis at the MTA and will help ensure that all New Yorkers can enjoy an affordable, sustainable transportation system. Second, this plan will transform the MTA from a closed, inefficient bureaucracy -- mired in stagnation -- into an organization that embraces the spirit of innovation and accountability that will help it improve now and in the future.

New Yorkers need and deserve a plan that will solve the problems of today while creating a culture and approach commensurate to the still unknown problems of tomorrow. Let's put an end to an MTA stuck treading water and build a public transportation system that helps move our City into the future.

I look forward to discussing this proposal with you or your members at your convenience. I thank you for your service to our state.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anthony D. Weiner', with a stylized flourish at the end.

ANTHONY D. WEINER  
Member of Congress