



FARE EQUITY FOR ALL NEW YORKERS

Mass transit is a great equalizer. Robust transit systems connect community members to jobs, schools, libraries, civic centers and other resources – increasing economic, political, and social opportunity beyond an individual’s immediate surroundings. While such a crucial resource, many New Yorkers face difficulty accessing public transportation due to income, disability, or geographic location. The Straphangers Campaign works hard to ensure that public transportation is accessible to all New Yorkers.

In New York City, the cost of living has skyrocketed while at the same time, the MTA recently hiked fares to \$2.90 per ride. The importance of free and reduced cost rides could not be more important.

SUPPORT THE EXPANSION OF FAIR FARES:

As New York City is faced with rising cost of living and a fiscal crisis at the MTA brought on by COVID-19, it is more important than ever that lower-income riders can get back on board and have access to affordable transit. Students organizing with the Straphangers Campaign were instrumental in the fight to win Fair Fares, a program that provides half-priced MetroCards to New Yorkers living at-or-below the federal poverty level.

While this campaign marked a huge victory for low-income New Yorkers, the program itself took a major financial hit in New York City’s budget during the pandemic. The program partly recovered funding in the past two budgets, adding \$75 million and \$20 million respectively. But, there is still much work to be done. New York City should continue to boost outreach programs to reach eligible New Yorkers and aid in the application process, while expanding Fair Fares to include all current CUNY students, and fund Fair Fares robustly so that all New Yorkers at 200% of the federal poverty level can access the program.

FACTS

Roughly 900,000 New York City Residents live in poverty, but only just over 332,000 low income New Yorkers are enrolled in the Fair Fares Program.

More than 168,000 passengers received free rides during the fare-capping pilot’s first month, saving users more than \$1 million in costs.

The cost of living in New York City is very high, compounded by wage stagnation that has not kept up with inflation.

A recent survey found that 90% of CUNY community college students use mass transit to commute to school and identified that “the challenge of affording a MetroCard came up more than any other single barrier” in college degree completion.

SUPPORT OMNY AND FARE-CAPPING:

For many riders, the fare discounts that are granted through weekly and monthly unlimited metrocards are cost-prohibitive due to the upfront payment system. This results in them paying more in one month on commuting than the cost of purchasing an unlimited metrocard.

In early 2022, however, the MTA announced a pilot program of OMNY fare-capping: all riders paying with OMNY would automatically ride free after 12 trips within one 7-day period, equivalent to purchasing an unlimited weekly metrocard. This program is a step in the right direction of utilizing new technologies to make mass transit more affordable, especially as we approach the phase-out of metrocards in 2024. Going forward, we would like to see the program made permanent, and expanded to cap fares on a monthly rather than weekly basis.

SUPPORT ALL-DOOR BOARDING:

All-door boarding is essential to achieve faster, reliable, equitable service for all New Yorkers.

The MTA has previously committed to implementing all-door-boarding. The system is currently operational on all SBS buses and the MTA has gone as far as installing all buses with OMNY technology at all doors. But, they have recently halted the roll-out of all-door-boarding, naming fare evasion as the reason. As Vice reporter Aaron Gordon puts it, fare evasion pops up “when the city gets swept up in the latest crime wave or quality-of-life fever or when the MTA needs to deflect attention from its own systemic mismanagement.”

MTA’s Chair and CEO Janno Lieber has initiated a panel on fare evasion, and has suggested that fare-payers feel like suckers when they see fare beaters. But, every day New Yorkers interviewed by Gothamist highlighted a bigger picture: riders prefer that the MTA focus on issues like more affordable fares, a cleaner system, and more timely service.¹

For more information contact: Natasha Elder, NYC Regional Director at nelder@nypirg.org

¹Stephen Nessen, James Ramsay, Michelle Bocanegra, Gwynne Hogan, & Nsikan Akpan, E. L. and S. C. (n.d.). Do subway riders really think they are 'suckers' for paying the fare? we asked. Gothamist. Retrieved August 16, 2022, from <https://gothamist.com/news/do-subway-riders-really-think-they-are-suckers-for-paying-the-fare-we-asked>