



**Testimony of Veronica Vanterpool, Tri-State Transportation Campaign
Westchester County Budget Hearing
Westchester County Center
December 6, 2011**

Good evening. My name is Veronica Vanterpool and I am the associate director of the Tri-State Transportation Campaign, a non-profit, policy organization advocating for better transit and sustainable transportation policy throughout New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut. Tri-State works with community residents, partner organizations, elected and agency officials, commissioners, mayors, and governors, to ensure that public transportation is well funded, affordable, and reliable and that local, state, and federal policies support transit, smart growth, and sustainable living.

In the 2012 Draft County budget, County Executive Astorino proposes painful cuts to many critical and essential social services. But, he spares service cuts and fare increases in the BeeLine bus system by maintaining current funding levels and ensuring that there is enough money to continue to run existing service throughout 2012. This is a much different outcome from last year's budget when 13 bus routes were on the chopping block and \$4.4 million in cuts to the DOT budget were pending. Fortunately, those cuts never took place in 2010 or 2011. We applaud the County Executive for recognizing the importance of the bus system.

Though the County is facing a deficit, we are relieved that the County Executive responded to the calls of bus riders and transit advocates alike to spare the bus system. BeeLine is one of the largest suburban bus systems in the country serving over 32 million customers last year. It is a lifeline for the 15% of Westchester residents who do not own a car yet need to get to work, school, doctor's appointments, social services and activities. BeeLine helps Westchester's economy, environment, and desirability as a place to live and work. Furthermore, it is a critical service for the 62% of bus riders who do not own a car. According to a 2010 BeeLine bus survey, of the 32 million annual riders:

- 67% are traveling to work
- 10% are going to school, such as SUNY Purchase
- 32% of those riding the bus earn less than \$10,000 annually
- Latinos and Blacks make up more than 2/3 of the ridership, 34% and 38% respectively
- 27% of the riders are between the ages of 20 and 29. 24% are 50 and older--a 4% increase in the past 4 years

These statistics show how much of a lifeline BeeLine is. Please don't delete funding for it. We need the support of the County Board of Legislators to maintain these funding levels and take a "no service cuts/fare increase" pledge during budget negotiations. Additionally, the budget relies on the same level of state funding and an increase in federal funding to DOT. As state funds for suburban buses dwindle and dedicated transit funds are used by the state legislature for non-transit needs, there is no guarantee the state will continue to fund BeeLine at the same level. Equally uncertain is Congressional funding for transit in 2012. Without that additional support, service cuts and fare increases could be on the horizon.

Because of these funding uncertainties, we urge County, State, and Congressional leaders to maintain the levels of funding proposed in this budget. But, the reality is that the BeeLine bus system also needs increased funds to expand service and embark on new initiatives, such as the new bus rapid transit system along Central Avenue that will speed commutes for 14,000 daily bus riders. With so many proposed cuts in this budget, this may seem impossible. But it shouldn't be understated that access to quality and affordable transportation goes hand in hand with access to essential social services.

In closing, we ask that you preserve, not delete, funding for BeeLine in the 2012 budget.

Thank you.