

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



**Testimony of Ryan Lynch, Policy Director**  
**Suffolk County Transit**  
**February 29, 2012**  
**631-742-7528**  
**rlynch@tstc.org**

My name is Ryan Lynch, and I am the policy director for the Tri-State Transportation Campaign, a non-profit transportation policy watchdog organization dedicated to creating a more balanced, environmentally friendly and equitable transportation system in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut.

Tri-State recognizes that Suffolk County Transit has not enacted a broad based fare increase in 20 years, despite growing ridership and costs, which is why we are not opposed to the idea of a fare increase. However, rather than increasing bus fares by 33% in one fell swoop, Tri-State urges the Suffolk County Legislature and County Executive Steve Bellone to phase the increase in over three years. Doing so would reduce the economic impact on Suffolk County Transit riders and on Suffolk's broader economy.

Suffolk County Transit riders earn \$20,000 less, on average, than motorists who drive to work alone. A sudden increase in fares overnight beginning on May 1<sup>st</sup> could cost weekday bus riders about \$100 more in 2012. This is a de facto tax increase for those who can least afford it and less money in their pockets to contribute to local businesses.

A phased in approach will allow riders to absorb a fare increase more easily, and allow riders to better plan for increased costs in the coming years.

The proposed 33% fare increase is expected to generate \$1 million to cover growing operating expenses for Suffolk's transit system. But, since this announcement, Governor Cuomo drafted a budget that includes approximately \$1.5 million more for Suffolk's bus system. This additional funding would help offset these growing operating costs. As a result, Tri-State calls on Suffolk County Transit to use the revenue from any fare increase to expand bus service.

For example, the experiment with Sunday service, by all reports, was an overwhelming success. Expanding Sunday service to all routes would be a logical first step.

Expanded bus service will also be necessary as gas prices continue to rise. Just a few weeks ago, it was reported that Long Island had some of the highest gas prices in the country. The last time gas prices spiked in 2008, ridership on Suffolk County Transit grew 8%, according to the National Transit Database. While ridership has fallen as a result of the recession, annual ridership still exceeds 6.5 million riders and is higher than pre-recession ridership.

With increased support from the state and a phased-in approach to fare increases, Suffolk County can begin to plan for even larger ridership gains as drivers shift from cars to transit while also improving bus service for its millions of annual riders. Suffolk County Transit has an opportunity to grow service, which will also help increase revenue to the system. We urge a

phased in approach to the fare increase and encourage Suffolk County Transit to use the unexpected state funding increase to expand service on Sundays.