

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



Testimony of Ryan Lynch, Associate Director

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My name is Ryan Lynch, and I am the associate 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.

Over the years, Suffolk County has done a good job in supporting its bus system, holding the line on fares for almost two decades and expanding service to Sundays during the past two summers, a popular expansion among riders and businesses. We applaud Suffolk County for recognizing the importance of its bus system.

The \$28 million included in the 2013 budget will continue to build on the growing popularity of bus transit in Suffolk County. From 2005 to 2011, the most recent data year available, annual ridership in Suffolk County has grown by almost 18%, a dramatic increase at a time when we saw Nassau County's bus ridership decrease by 3.5% and ridership on the Long Island Rail Road dropped by roughly 1.7% over the same time period. In fact, the only comparable system that saw ridership growth higher than Suffolk County Transit from 2005-2011 was the Westchester Bee Line, which grew by roughly 25%. This jump was largely because of the introduction of Metrocards and free transfers to New York City buses and subways. Just two weeks ago, the Suffolk County Legislature unanimously passed legislation that instructed the Department of Public Works to investigate similar initiatives and opportunities. If implemented, Suffolk County Transit could see even greater growth in ridership.

Suffolk County's continued support for its bus system is important because Suffolk County Transit is a critical service for county residents. Transit riders earn \$20,000 less, on average, than motorists who drive to work alone. Roughly 5.4% of Suffolk County households—about 27,000 of them—do not have access to an automobile, making bus service a critical lifeline to jobs and the local economy.

Investment in Suffolk County Transit must continue to grow, however. After year over year growth in ridership, Sunday bus service on the two pilot program routes on the East End should be made permanent, as well as be expanded to additional routes throughout the majority of the system.

But we also recognize that Suffolk County is already doing its fair share. That is why Tri-State, in partnership with over 20 business, labor, civic, planning and rider advocacy groups, recently sent a letter to Suffolk County's state elected officials urging them to do more to support Suffolk County's bus system. While New York State increased funding by \$1.5 million to Suffolk County this past year as a result of redirecting a certain tax to suburban bus systems, this allocation was only guaranteed for one year. We will once again fight to make this permanent, but even with this increase in funding, New York State only contributes 31% of Suffolk County

Transit's budget as compared to 47% of Nassau County's. Suffolk County's state assembly members and senators must do more to bolster bus service in the county.

Thank you again for your leadership and support for Suffolk County's bus system. Continued support of transit will help improve and expand transportation choice in Suffolk County, reduce congestion, bolster our economy, protect our environment and enhance the quality of life of Suffolk County residents.