

**Long Island Bus Riders Union  
Long Island Federation of Labor, AFL/CIO  
Long Island Jobs With Justice  
Long Island Progressive Coalition**

**New York Public Interest Research Group  
RWDSU Local 338  
Tri-State Transportation Campaign  
Vision Long Island**

**Group Statement on NICE Hearing on Fare Hike Impacts  
January 10, 2013**

Good evening. My name is Ryan Lynch and I am the associate director for the Tri-State Transportation Campaign, a policy and advocacy organization working for a more balanced transportation network in New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut. I'm speaking on behalf of numerous organizations today to oppose potential fare increases for NICE bus riders.

We remain concerned about the likelihood of increased NICE bus fares in 2013, which would be a de facto tax hike for some of the most vulnerable populations in Nassau County. If fares are raised on NICE customers, they will be paying more for less service in 2013. According to the National Transit Database, through October of 2012, NICE provided 9.5% fewer miles of service and 10% fewer hours of service than in 2011. These service reductions resulted in approximately 3% fewer riders in 2012 than 2011.

Adding fare increases to the burden of these reductions in service will likely reduce ridership further. In fact, when neighboring Suffolk County raised fares in May of 2012, ridership decreased by approximately 6%. The same is likely to happen in Nassau County. Reduced ridership equates to reduced revenue and could lead to additional cuts in service as well. This will reduce farebox revenue and lead to the need for further fare increases. It's an ongoing cycle and it must stop.

Nassau County bus riders and New York State have done their part. Riders consistently bear the impact and continued threat of service cuts and fare increases and Nassau's state elected officials have time and again come to the system's rescue with increased State Transit Operating Assistance (STOA) and other forms of bus transit aid. In fact, New York State's contribution to NICE's operating budget now makes up almost 50% of total funding while farebox revenue makes up 35%.

Nassau County's contribution, on the other hand, makes up only 2% of total funding. Of a \$113 million annual operating budget, Nassau County contributes \$2.6 million.

How can this be called the County's bus system when every other party pays significantly more than the County? It is the Nassau Inter-County Express and not New York State Inter-County Express after all. It's time for the County to take more responsibility for its bus system. One way it can do this and stand up for riders in the face of this potential fare increase is to negotiate a plan to pay for transfers for riders who use both NICE and MTA systems.

In addition, moving forward, the Bus Transit Committee must provide more opportunities for the public to weigh in before making a decision.

Our groups urge you to hold additional public hearings at more transit accessible locations. While NICE headquarters is accessible by bus, holding meetings in areas that are linked by many more routes, like near the Rosa Parks Terminal in Hempstead or the Mineola Intermodal facility, would allow greater ease of access for riders to attend hearings.

Additionally, hearing times of 2pm and 5pm make it difficult for working people to attend and greater flexibility is necessary to ensure robust participation. These hearings should also be announced well in advance of taking place. Riders were only given one week notice of this hearing, a short period of time to be able to take off work or modify schedules to attend. Future hearings must be advertised with much more advance warning as is done for transit systems elsewhere in the region. For example, the MTA provides at least one month's notice prior to hearings on fare hikes or service cuts, and Westchester County provided three and a half weeks notice for similar fare hike hearings they are holding at the end of January.

And finally, if Nassau County fails to come to riders aid, and the Bus Transit Committee endorses fare increases that could cost users of the system hundreds of dollars more a year, any new revenue from higher fares, must be dedicated to restoring previous service reductions or expanding and enhancing service on high ridership routes.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.