

<b>ENVISION VALLEY STREAM</b>	<b>NYPIRG NCCC CHAPTER</b>
<b>LONG ISLAND BUS RIDERS UNION</b>	<b>LOCAL 338 RWDSU/UFCW</b>
<b>LONG ISLAND BUSINESS COUNCIL</b>	<b>TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN</b>
<b>LONG ISLAND JOBS WITH JUSTICE</b>	<b>VISION LONG ISLAND</b>

**PRESS RELEASE**

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**CONTACT**

*Tri-State Transportation Campaign*

Ryan Lynch

Cell: 631-742-7528

Office: 212-268-7474

**Businesses Lead Charge in Call for Nassau County to Increase NICE Funding**

MINEOLA—Bus riders, small businesses and transit, planning, business and environmental advocates gathered at the Nassau County Legislature this morning to call on the County’s elected officials to increase funding for NICE Bus in the 2014 Nassau County budget.

According to Nassau County’s proposed \$2.79 billion budget, County support for NICE Bus remains at a paltry \$2.6 million, making up less than one tenth of one percent of the entire budget. The historically low level of funding has led to high levels of dissatisfaction from riders and continued ridership decreases resulting from reduced service. A NICE survey released last month found a 32 point drop in ridership satisfaction (61 percent to 29 percent) over the same time period last year and ridership, according to the National Transit Database, through July 2013, has fallen by 5.3 percent since NICE took over operations in 2012.

Bus riders and small business owners and business advocacy groups like the Long Island Business Council, were joined by the Tri-State Transportation Campaign, Vision Long Island, Long Island Jobs with Justice, NYPIRG’s Nassau County Community College Chapter and Local 338 RWDSU/UFCW, in criticizing Nassau County’s elected officials for failing to support Nassau County’s beleaguered bus system.

“As a small business owner, increasing NICE Bus funding would help bring additional customers to my business,” said David Sabatino, owner of Sip This Coffeehouse in Valley Stream and President of Envision Valley Stream. “As a civic leader who cares about my community, more funding would help promote a sustainable mode of transportation to help reduce congestion on our streets.”

Using details from the contract between Nassau County and Veolia Transportation, the group estimated that even if Nassau County’s elected officials added \$7.3 million to the County’s contribution to NICE bus—a sum equal to the service cuts made in April 2012—NICE would be able to add almost 84,000 hours of service while only increasing the proposed budget by .26 percent.

“Businesses depend on good transit service as a way to diversify employment pools and attract new customers,” said Rich Bivone, Nassau Chair of the Long Island Business Council. “More funding from Nassau County will allow businesses to grow and continue the economic recovery.”

Additional funding for more service would not only benefit existing riders, but help recover lost ridership and grow ridership for the system, and in turn, new customers for local businesses.

“We need more county funding in order to provide better information and signage to current bus riders and make it attractive and easy for new customers,” said Jeannine Maloney, owner of The Bold Chocolatier in Valley Stream.

“Having a functioning bus system is the cornerstone of any economic strategy to grow our downtown business districts, said Eric Alexander, executive director for Vision Long Island. “There is a strong market for bus service in Nassau County but the funding needs to be adequate.”

While additional service would help local businesses and downtown redevelopment projects thrive, increased funding would also help those dependent upon the system to get to school and conduct their daily lives.

“As a bus rider, I know how important it is for our bus system to be properly funded. My fare has gone up in the past year so I’ve paid more. Now the County needs to pay its fair share too,” said Aaron Watkins-Lopez, an organizer with the Bus Riders' Union.

“NCC students ride the bus from many different towns in the County to get to NCC and we would benefit from more bus service,” said NCC sophomore, Hazey Perez. “The state has done their part, the students at NCC who ride the bus have been paying our fares, and now we hope that the County will hold up their end of the bargain.”

Transportation budget and policy analysts highlighted that a small increase in funding would provide numerous benefits while doing little to strain the county’s budget.

“The County’s miniscule contribution to NICE Bus is really penny-wise and pound foolish,” said Ryan Lynch, associate director for the Tri-State Transportation Campaign. “More funding for the bus system will do little to break Nassau County’s bank but would bring huge dividends to riders, local businesses and the environment.”

“Increasing the County contribution for bus service is a worthy investment” said Brian Lupo, NYPIRG Project Coordinator at Nassau Community College. “It’s the type of investment that provides more reliable and frequent service for riders, especially students.”

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*The Tri-State Transportation Campaign is a non-profit organization working toward a more balanced, transit-friendly and equitable transportation system in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut.*