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BUS RIDERS, ADVOCATES DELIVER NEARLY 1,500 PETITIONS TO SUFFOLK COUNTY STATE ELECTED OFFICIALS CALLING FOR BETTER FUNDING AND SERVICE

PATCHOGUE—Suffolk County Transit riders, students and advocates held a press conference at the Patchogue Long Island Rail Road station today to call on Suffolk County's state elected delegation to find additional funding for the County's bus system. At the press conference, the group released nearly 1,500 petitions from Suffolk County Transit riders and residents that highlighted the broad based support for expanding service on Suffolk County Transit. Immediately following the press conference, the participants boarded the S40 bus to deliver the petitions to State Senator Phil Boyle's office in Bay Shore, the first of all of the representatives in the state delegation that they intend to visit.

The event followed a New York State budget session where Suffolk County's state elected official's failed to ensure a substantial boost in state funding for bus service. Despite numerous requests from riders, advocates, businesses and workers, as well as Suffolk County Executive Steve Bellone, for \$10 million in transit operating assistance, only \$500,000 in increased support was included in the final budget, not even enough to cover inflation increases from 2013.

The lack of a substantial boost continues the regional funding imbalance that Suffolk County Transit experiences every year. In 2013, Suffolk County contributed to over 50 percent of Suffolk County Transit's operating budget, while New York State only contributed 35 percent to the system. In comparison, neighboring Nassau County only contributes 2 percent to Nassau Inter-County Express' operating budget while the state contributes over 50 percent.

Students, workers and riders who depend on Suffolk County buses to access higher education and jobs secured the petitions over a three week period which called on Suffolk County's state senators and assembly members to find additional funding for the system to provide service later into the evenings and on routes that currently do not provide Sunday service.

The group intends to drop the petitions off at the offices of each Suffolk County state elected official over the course of the coming week in the hopes that their elected representatives will find additional funds to support bus service. A similar funding allocation occurred in the spring of 2011 when New York State Senators from Nassau County found \$9 million in funding outside the normal state budget process to stave off cuts in service to Nassau County's bus system.

"A large population of students at Suffolk County Community College relies upon the bus to get them to and from campus and class. Since there is a lack of bus service, student's education, and ultimately their

futures, are being hindered. It would only make sense that a college such as Suffolk Community, which is a commuter college, would have proficient bus service throughout all hours of the day and evening. It is ridiculous to see our educations halted due to the lack of bus service. We need our State Senators and Assembly members to support the further education of Long Island's future workforce by providing more funding for the bus system," said Alexander Alvarado, Student Government Association President for Suffolk County Community College's Ammerman Campus.

Participants in today's press conference and bus ride pointed specifically to the need for bus service to be expanded later into the evening. Riders and workers complained that their ability to work more and later hours is severely limited by bus service that ends at 7 pm on weekdays.

"I represent many riders in Suffolk County that depend on the bus to get to and from work, specifically those who work at the Riverhead Tanger Outlets and the newly built Walmart Supercenter," said Octavia Clarkson, a bus commuter. "Many of these workers, including my two siblings, do not work the typical Monday to Friday, 9 to 5 work schedule and deserve to have transportation once their shift is over or at the close of business. I know that there is much more that can be done to extend this bus service into the evenings as well as increase Sunday service to more than 10 local routes."

"Lack of adequate bus services should not be a reason for students, working people or professionals to be limited in accessing life opportunities," said Dawn Wing, a librarian at Suffolk County Community College's Ammerman Campus. "Frequent bus breakdowns, insufficient emergency bus back-ups, lack of evening hour services make it difficult for Suffolk Community College students to attend classes and for faculty, such as myself, to work over-time. Enhancing bus services would benefit all Suffolk community members, not just current bus riders. To invest in public transportation is to invest in the prosperity of Long Island."

Suffolk County recently used a small bump in state and federal funds to launch limited Sunday bus service along 10 routes in January. Since the launch, ridership has grown exponentially. Through the end of March, Sunday ridership had grown by 97 percent allowing more and more people to affordably access work and businesses to conduct weekly shopping. In fact, the S40 that participants boarded to Bay Shore saw a 56 percent increase in Sunday ridership from January through March.

"A good public transportation system reflects the needs of ridership, and today, Suffolk County students and workers are expressing their frustrations with a system that is not receiving enough attention from our state leaders. It makes sense to fulfill the growing needs of bus riders," said Anita Halasz, Executive Director of Long Island Jobs with Justice, "but without state funding, we cannot operate a healthy and robust system."

"Suffolk County has done a decent job of supporting its bus system and has shown that if given additional resources they will expand service," said Ryan Lynch, associate director of the Tri-State Transportation, a non-profit policy organization. "Suffolk County's New York State elected officials need to do more to support the millions of riders and businesses who depend on the reliability of the system."

"After collecting hundreds of petition signatures from students at SUNY Stony Brook, it is clear that students need more SCT bus service" said NYPIRG regional supervisor, Jaqi Cohen. "Stony Brook students are taking the S60, S69, and 3D routes that allow them to travel off campus to places like Port Jefferson and the Smith Haven Mall. Hundreds of students have signed our petition calling on our state elected officials to improve these vital services. We want them to heed their call for more SCT bus services."

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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 Connecticut, New York and New Jersey.