



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Tri-State Transportation Campaign Statement on MTA's 2021 Budget Proposal

*On Wednesday, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) presented its 2021 budget proposal during a monthly board meeting, which will be followed by a vote in December. Without more federal funding, the MTA will be forced to move forward with a plan to cut as much as 50% of commuter rail service and 40% of New York City's subway and bus service (final numbers pending public release of the proposed budget). In response, **Nick Sifuentes, Executive Director of Tri-State Transportation Campaign**, released the following statement:*

"It's hard not to feel like these cuts would be the beginning of the end for the MTA, and for New York as we know it.

"Every single weekday before the pandemic, nearly 8 million riders depended on transit to get to and from work. Now, with a vaccine on the horizon, how are those workers going to get to offices and worksites all across the city when we reopen? New York City can't support millions of new cars flooding our streets. For over a hundred years, our city has relied on mass transit. New York doesn't work without our subways, our buses, our commuter rail. But with cuts this draconian, riders will have no choice but to drive--or leave. This is a death knell for the entire region, and our entire national economy will tremble in its wake.

"Make no mistake: this is not a crisis of the MTA's making; rather, it is entirely a manmade one born at the hands of Republicans in Congress who refuse to jumpstart our recovery, who would instead prefer to hogtie our economy. However, unlike COVID-19, we can still stop it from coming to pass.

"We continue to call on the White House and Republican Senate to pass these desperately needed funds during the lame duck session of Congress. If Republicans only move forward with a so-called 'skinny stimulus,' we call on them to include transit funds as part of COVID relief immediately."

Below are public comments offered by Executive Director Nick Sifuentes at the MTA Board meeting on November 18, 2020:



“Good Morning. I am Nick Sifuentes, Executive Director of Tri-State Transportation Campaign, a non-profit advocacy and policy organization fighting for sustainable mobility in New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut.

“As New York City faces a second wave of COVID-19, the damage from the first wave continues at the MTA: ridership is still dramatically off from normal, and reductions in fares, tolls, and taxes mean the MTA continues to operate on a shoestring.

“Transit advocates have been pushing for six months for the federal government to act by approving emergency relief to the states and cities and to provide \$32 billion in relief for public transit authorities nationwide, including up to \$12 billion for the MTA. These funds would help prevent a death spiral in our public transit systems and stave off disastrous service cuts and layoffs.

“We will continue to call on the White House and Republican Senate to pass these desperately needed funds during the lame duck session of Congress. If Republicans only move forward with a so-called skinny stimulus, we call on them to include transit funds as part of covid relief, keeping in mind that transit is key to the region’s economic recovery as well as to curbing dangerous greenhouse gas emissions.

“Meanwhile, the state and the city should continue to advocate for congestion pricing as part of our own local solution to the MTA’s funding needs, as well as to prepare for an onslaught of cars once offices in Midtown reopen in 2021, as a vaccine is now on the horizon. Unless we want NYC’s recovery to grind to a halt in endless gridlock from cars flooding into white-collar workplaces, we must prepare now. Governor Cuomo should seat the Traffic Mobility Review Board immediately, and the city and state should push the new administration to approve congestion pricing in January.

“Some have questioned whether now is the time for congestion pricing, and misplaced concerns over transit’s safety continue. The reality is this: the choices we make now will shape New York’s recovery for years to come. Whether millions of daily riders will come back to transit or take to the streets en masse in new cars is entirely dependent on how the city and state shape public policy. We know transit is safe when proper protocols like mask-wearing and good ventilation are followed—even at the height of the pandemic, study after study demonstrated that no covid outbreaks were ever traced back to transit. And just this week a study in Nature highlighted the places that carried the biggest risk of spreading covid, including restaurants, gyms, and churches. Transit was nowhere on the list.

“Meanwhile, in lieu of forthcoming relief, we must make the best of an impossible situation. We applaud the MTA and Bob Foran for presenting a budget with options that will allow for the greatest flexibility in the new year as we remain uncertain about the possibility and amount of potential federal relief dollars.



“Additionally, in the face of cuts, we call on the MTA to:

- Provide opportunities for real and meaningful public input so that the public has an opportunity to provide input and guidance on keeping transit service as relevant to the people’s needs as possible.
- Be as transparent as possible. Communicate with riders about any and all changes, create meaningful and direct paths of communication about changes in service so that riders are properly informed and can plan accordingly.
- Be mindful of racial and economic equity in planning all changes and cuts. Prioritize maintaining service in communities that are most dependent on transit for travel to work, school, and other essential travel. With this in mind, we call on the MTA to restore 24 hour service to better serve essential workers and shift workers.

“With transparency, effective communication, and all of us taking proper precautions, we can weather this disaster and get to the other side.”

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Tri-State Transportation Campaign is a 27-year old advocacy organization that fights for an equitable, safe, multi-modal transportation network that provides options and supports the economies of New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut. TSTC works to fix our commutes, meet our climate goals, stop traffic deaths, and make transportation fair.