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The Subway Success Matrix: Leading Advocates Release the Criteria Riders Will Use to Judge Gov. Cuomo's Subway Repair Plan

One Day after Train Derailment, Rider Advocates Focus on Outcomes, Best Practices and Lasting Solutions, Rather Than Flashy New Ideas

NEW YORK, NY—One day after a train derailment caused dozens of injuries, and the day before Governor Cuomo gathers participants to launch his proposed MTA “Genius” competition for new ideas to fix the subway, the city’s leading transportation advocates released a letter to the Governor outlining their “Subway Success Matrix”: the simple, rider-focused criteria that nearly six million daily subway riders will use to judge Governor Cuomo’s subway rescue plan.

The letter (attached), from the Riders Alliance, TransitCenter, NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign, Regional Plan Association and Tri-State Transportation Campaign, argued that the real “genius” required to fix the transit system is a political one: Governor Cuomo, who runs the MTA, must empower people to install existing technological improvements more quickly, and must support the MTA with the resources required to make up for decades of underinvestment in public transit infrastructure.

The advocates outlined five basic criteria that riders will use to evaluate any plan the Governor puts forth:

- 1) Restore reliable service.** A successful plan will address widespread breakdowns and delays, which have skyrocketed in recent years. Riders should be able to leave home in the morning knowing that they will arrive on time to work.
- 2) Expand capacity of our existing system.** While many delays are caused by crowding, that crowding is the result of underinvestment in public transit, which has not kept pace with the number of people who depend on our subways today. A successful plan will help public transit carry more people safely and comfortably, particularly at rush hour, so that riders won’t have to let trains go by or cram themselves onto packed trains.

- 3) **Include short-term fixes and a long-term vision.** Some changes will take years to enact; others can be done today with changes to MTA operations and service. A successful plan will build for the future while recognizing that riders need emergency relief now, and will communicate a vision for both.
- 4) **Communicate better with riders.** A significant amount of rider frustration during delays is the result of poor communication from the MTA, which leaves straphangers unsure of when the delay will be resolved and what travel alternatives are available. Any plan for fixing the subways must include steps to improve communication when delays inevitably occur.
- 5) **Improve access for all.** The current crisis is an opportunity to rectify the MTA's barriers to access for people with disabilities, seniors, and people traveling with young children.

In order to accomplish these goals, the transit advocates said the Governor must lead in two important ways:

- **Reform the MTA's capital construction process.** Current timelines for modernizing the MTA's most basic operating equipment anticipate decades of work for upgrades that other global capitals such as London and Paris have already made. Construction costs routinely balloon, sometimes reaching multiples of a project's original plan, and timelines are continually extended. The MTA has creative, quality employees who are looking to take on these core challenges for the agency—we need your leadership to establish a reform mandate and empower the people who can accomplish it.
- **Identify a fair and sustainable funding source to fix public transit.** New York must make up for decades of underinvestment in mass transit, and there is no way to fix it on the cheap. Today, the State continues to step away from its commitment to fund public transit, most recently stripping \$65 million from a recurring annual revenue source that helped pay for MTA operations. Only the State has the legal authority to raise new revenue to support public transit, for example by implementing the Move NY Fair Plan to adjust bridge tolls, expanding an income tax surcharge on the wealthiest New Yorkers, or imposing a carbon tax that could also reduce emissions. A credible plan to fix transit will come with a price tag, and a fair and sustainable way to pay for it.

TransitCenter executive director David Bragdon said, "It doesn't take a genius to focus on the fundamentals: maintenance, disciplined management and meeting deadlines. Other large cities with old infrastructure have brought their systems up to date, and it's not because they have more geniuses than New York has."

"There is no shortage of brilliant ideas for how to fix New York's transportation infrastructure" says Veronica Vanterpool, executive director of Tri-State Transportation Campaign. "However, there is a shortage of leadership and vision. It won't matter at all what comes out of this "Genius" competition if no one is willing to put these ideas into action."

John Raskin, Executive Director of the Riders Alliance, said, "The transit system is facing a crisis of leadership and a lack of reliable funding, not a dearth of ideas for how to fix the subway. Any credible path to a solution begins with Governor Cuomo laying out a plan to fix public transit and investing enough money to make it possible."

"If transit managers want the respect and patience of the riding public, they have to do a much better job of keeping riders well informed," said Gene Russianoff, attorney for the NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign. "That's especially true when the riders have to cope with unexpected delays and disruptions."

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