



NYPIRG

## **Straphangers Campaign**

a project of the New York Public Interest Research Group Fund

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**TESTIMONY OF  
JAQI COHEN  
STRAPHANGERS CAMPAIGN COORDINATOR BEFORE THE  
NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE ON  
REDUCED FARES FOR LOW-INCOME NEW YORKERS**

**February 13<sup>th</sup>, 2017**

Mass transit is a great equalizer. Robust transit systems connect community members to jobs, schools, libraries, civic centers, and other resources – increasing economic, political, and social opportunity beyond an individual's immediate surroundings. Despite being such a crucial resource, many New Yorkers face difficulty accessing subway and bus service. Since 2005, riders in New York City have faced six fare hikes, and a decrease in fare bonus and increase in weekly and monthly MetroCards approved just last month. While many New Yorkers struggle to pay the fare, it is especially burdensome on the poor, many of whom simply cannot afford the cost of subway or bus fare.

Low-income New Yorkers are disproportionately burdened by increased transportation costs. More than one third of all low-income, working-age New Yorkers have reported that the rising transit fares have prevented them from either seeking or accepting employment further from where they live.<sup>1</sup> Transit inaccessibility further perpetuates the cycle of poverty by limiting educational and employment opportunities for low-income New Yorkers, and rising costs make it exceedingly difficult for these individuals to live in New York City or even attempt to complete a college degree. For example, according to the most recent Student Experience Survey conducted by the City University of New York (CUNY) in 2016, about 60% of all CUNY students live in households making less than \$30,000 a year.<sup>2</sup>

New York City already offers reduced fares to many of its residents. Senior citizens over the age of 65, New Yorkers with disabilities, and high school students under the age of 18 already benefit from discounted MetroCards, but unfortunately many low-income New Yorkers do not benefit from these programs. Additionally, middle class New Yorkers are able to save hundreds of dollars each year through pre-tax benefits towards their MetroCards. If implemented, an estimated 800,000 New Yorkers would benefit from a reduced-fare system, saving individuals over \$700 annually.<sup>3</sup>

The Straphangers Campaign feels strongly that no New Yorker should have to risk losing a job or forgoing a college education due to the cost of a MetroCard. It is time that New York City provide financial relief to its neediest residents and adopt a fair fare system, much like Seattle, San Francisco, and Chicago have already done,<sup>4</sup> and allow for low-income New Yorkers to have the opportunity to get on board.

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<sup>1</sup> Rankin, N.; Stolper, R. (2016). *The Transit Affordability Crisis: How Reduced MTA Fares Can Help Low-Income New Yorkers Move Ahead*. Page 13. Retrieved from Community Service Society's website at: <http://www.cssny.org/publications/entry/the-transit-affordability-crisis>

<sup>2</sup> Table Two, Socio-Economic Status of CUNY Undergraduates. <https://public.tableau.com/profile/oira.cuny - /vizhome/2016StudentExperienceSurvey/MainMenu>

<sup>3</sup> Rankin, N.; Stolper, R. (2016). *The Transit Affordability Crisis: How Reduced MTA Fares Can Help Low-Income New Yorkers Move Ahead*. Page 3. Retrieved from Community Service Society's website at: <http://www.cssny.org/publications/entry/the-transit-affordability-crisis>

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<sup>4</sup> Luzer, Daniel. "In Some Cities, Your Bus Fare Now Depends On Your Income". *GOVERNING*. May, 2015. Retrieved from GOVERNING's website at: <http://www.governing.com/topics/urban/gov-seattle-bus-fare.html>