

No Fare Hike - No Fare at All!

(FELICE GRUSKIN, Executive Director of Transit Riders in Pursuit (TRIP) of New York City, spoke before a public hearing of the Metropolitan Transit Authority on November 27, concerning a proposed fare increase for public transit in New York. Her testimony follows.)

TRIP is here today not only to argue that a fare increase is not justified, but also to explain why a no-fare system is feasible... There are many reasons why an increase in the fare is not justified:

a) The quality of the service is still poor. The workers seem poorly trained and they don't know what to do in a crisis, as evidenced by their lack of competence in the tunnel incident in Queens this year.

b) The system has been guilty of waste. How can we easily forget the situation with the Grumman buses which were literally thrown away, at enormous expense?

c) The system has not been accountable to the people of New York City for its over-inflated operating figures. Its irresponsibility just adds to these figures for which they seek increases. The following are just some of the examples of this in the last five years: The number of transit executives has risen from 108 to 1800, at salaries of \$50,000, adding 84 million dollars to the operating figures. The number of transit Managers has risen from 8 to 14, at salaries of \$100,000. The number of transit Vice-Presidents has risen from 28 to 63, at salaries of \$90,000 per year. In the last thirty years, this irresponsibility has increased dramatically, as evidenced by the fact that there were no consumer transit organizations before 1963 and no public hearings prior to 1974. The wrongs of the Authority and general complaints about its have continued on an upward spiral.

TRIP is dedicated to the idea that New York City's transit system should be fare-free and the best in the world. A no-fare system could be accomplished by

placing a 6% surcharge on land value taxes. Such a system would result in lowering the average New Yorker's transit expense by one-half. Let me explain. According to the MTA, token sales contribute one billion dollars per year to its maintenance. The 6% figure is derived by dividing this one billion dollar figure by 18 billion dollars in land assessment value for the City of New York. If you own an average-sized condominium near the corner of East 94th Street and Madison Avenue, the land value for each unit might be approximately \$6200 per year. A surcharge of 6% on the land value would mean a total of \$310 to be applied to the transit system. According to the MTA, the average New Yorker riding the subways spends \$750 per year (using an average of 3 tokens per day, five days per week, 50 weeks per year) on tokens. As you can see, the amount of contribution paid to the system through land value surcharge is much lower than the amount paid in tokens. Now that a computer is part of tax operations, getting a list of landowners and placing a surcharge on their land value tax (as part of their property tax) would be a simple matter.

There are also many unmeasurable but real advantages to having a no-fare system. There are benefits related to safety in the subways: because more people would use the subways, they would become safer places (there is "safety in numbers"). Better air quality and better traffic movement would result from people not using their cars as frequently. There could also be more transit personnel on platforms (they would not be necessary in the booths). Culturally, the system would be an incentive to partake of the city's rich diversity. And just think: no more exact change on buses and no more lines at the token booth.

(Others who testified also noted that the proximity of transit facilities increases property values and they should be called on to pay more of the expense. Since the MTA can do whatever it wants, all the testimony was in vain. Every witness argued against a fare increase. On January 1 the NYC transit fare went up from \$1.00 to \$1.15.)