

## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Group Launches Major Ad Campaign in 3,000 Subway Cars**

#### ***Goal is to Mobilize Riders to Oppose MTA Service Cuts and Fare Hikes, Push For Funds to Repair System***

(New York – February 23, 2009) The Empire State Transportation Alliance (ESTA) today launched an ad campaign to mobilize New Yorkers to oppose harsh Metropolitan Transportation Authority service cuts and fare hikes that will start to take effect March 25, unless the state legislature passes a plan by then to provide new revenues to the MTA.

The ads, which can be seen today in 3,000 New York City subway cars – nearly half of all subway cars – urge riders to tell Governor Paterson and state legislative leaders to support a plan that would provide critical funds to close the MTA’s \$1.2 billion operating deficit this year and fund the agency’s maintenance and rebuilding program.

“Our ad urges transit riders to speak up,” said Robert Yaro, president of the Regional Plan Association, a civic group and co-chair of the ESTA coalition. “Lawmakers need to act now or else draconian cuts will go into effect. At a time when the American economy has hit a weak point, it would be a big mistake to let public transit falter. Doing so will hurt our struggling businesses and discourage new enterprises from starting. Transit cuts also place an undue burden on the City’s poorest workers who are already suffering tremendously. We hope this campaign will challenge riders to stand up and take action.”

With a sharp, simple design, the ad humorously points to the economic burden riders will carry once fare hikes are in place. Below a photo of the subway staircase descending to the 21<sup>st</sup> and Van Alst station on the G line, the caption reads: “At \$103 a month, you’d expect they’d have a sauna, a pool and Pilates classes down there.” The ad urges riders to go to a website – [www.KeepNewYorkMoving.org](http://www.KeepNewYorkMoving.org) – and send a message “to Gov. Paterson and your state legislators demanding more reliable funding for New York’s growing transit needs.”

“The message of the ad is powerful: Act now or pay later in longer waits, more crowding, higher fares, crumbling stations, and aging subway cars, buses and commuter trains,” said Gene Russianoff, staff attorney for the Straphangers Campaign, a transit riders group.

“Transit is the lifeblood of New York City because millions of commuters depend on it to get to work. We can’t afford to shortchange transit in these tough economic times,” said Andy Darrell, Vice President of Environmental Defense Fund’s Living Cities. “Transit reduces air and global warming pollution that threatens our planet. Nationally, transportation accounts for 28 percent of greenhouse gas emissions that cause global warming, but in New York, it’s only 21 percent thanks, in part, to our reliance on mass transit.”

The MTA faces a huge capital shortfall – with no money in hand for its next \$25 billion-plus five-year rebuilding plan – in addition to the projected \$1.2 billion operating deficit for 2009.

“We believe riders will respond strongly to the ads and speak up for funding better transit,” added Denise Richardson, president of the General Contractors Association of New York. “The time to act is now. Riders are facing cuts and construction workers are facing jobs losses.”

“Adequate support for operating, maintaining, and expanding New York’s transit system is essential for not only the New York City metropolitan region but also for the economic wellbeing of New York State. We have procrastinated for too long. We need to provide a solid base of support for the MTA now and for the future,” said Dr. James Melius, administrator, NYS Laborers’ Trifunds.

“We have a transit crisis on our hands with major service cuts, fare increases and no capital funding available,” said Kevin S. Corbett, co-chair of the Empire State Transportation Alliance. “The state is going to have to make tough choices for saving the transit system. We’re looking to Albany for leadership. Our hope is that these ads help focus the debate.”

“These 3,000 ads are a call to action,” says Paul Steely White, Executive Director of Transportation Alternatives. “New York’s 7.5 million daily straphangers can’t sit (or stand) idly while their commuting costs soar and service erodes.”

“The ad is effective because we don’t have a luxury system and there are no frills to cut. Our transit system is a necessity, and riders must send that message loud and clear to their State elected representatives and demand that they take action now,” said William Henderson, Executive Director, Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA.

“We need strong leadership in Albany,” said Kate Slevin, executive director of the Tri-State Transportation Campaign, a regional policy watchdog group. “Tough choices have to be made but we must all share the transit system’s cost. Everyone benefits from our robust public transportation network, so everyone – including businesses, riders, and drivers – should share the burden of paying for it.”

“Raising fares and cutting service is a double-whammy that is especially harsh in these tough economic times,” said Rich Kassel, Senior Attorney and urban transportation expert at the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC). “Our subways and buses are the key to the city’s future sustainability. Now more than ever, Albany needs to provide the funding to ensure that transit stays affordable and reliable.”

“Modern, safe and efficient mass transit systems are vital to New York’s economic vitality. They efficiently feed job centers, reduce congestion and our reliance on expensive foreign oil,” said Ross Pepe, President, Construction Industry Council of Westchester and Hudson Valley, Inc.

“This ad campaign reminds riders that the fate of our mass transit system rests in the hands of the governor and the state Legislature,” said Marcia Bystryn, president of the New York League of Conservation Voters. “Our Albany leaders must take steps now to fix the MTA’s current financial troubles and identify long-term solutions that will provide stable funding for years to come.”

The communications campaign cost approximately \$120,000, which was raised through contributions from groups supporting transit. No funds were obtained from government sources. The groups’ efforts also include distribution of tens of thousands of leaflets to New York City subway and bus riders and outreach to community and civic groups.

Produced by Robbett Advocacy Media, the ads are sponsored by ESTA, a coalition of nonprofit, business and civic groups supporting better transit for New York. Members include Regional Plan Association, NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign, General Contractors Association of New York, Environmental Defense Action Fund, Tri-State Transportation Campaign, New York State Laborers’, ACEC New York, Campaign for New York’s Future, Construction Industry Council of New York, Long Island Contractor’s Association, Natural Resources Defense Council, New York State Building and Construction Trades Council, New York League of Conservation Voters, Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to MTA, Transportation Alternatives.

The ad can be found at [http://ga3.org/newyorksfuture/kynm\\_adlaunch.html](http://ga3.org/newyorksfuture/kynm_adlaunch.html).

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