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May 1, 2009

Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Obama,

I write to respectfully urge that your Administration take immediate steps to provide funding relief for mass transit riders across the country who are facing drastic service cuts and skyrocketing fare hikes. Although the nation now confronts many difficult challenges, this issue in particular threatens the economic stability of many of our nation's cities.

Swift action on your part also would protect thousands of "green" jobs--living wage jobs now at risk because of transit funding shortfalls from New York City to Tacoma and in dozens of cities in between. It would additionally save the jobs of many Americans who otherwise would be without the ability to travel to their workplaces.

In New York City, the situation is particularly dire. The system you depended on as a college student is now reeling from a nearly \$2 billion deficit, caused in large part by the decline of a wide variety of business revenues that support transit.

A "doomsday" budget passed here in December imposes more than 300 service reductions, including the complete elimination of at least 21 bus routes, less service on virtually every subway route, and the loss of 205 station agents. The fare would rise significantly--soon after a mid-2008 hike--and at least 1,100 employees would be laid off; notices to 480 workers were sent just last week.

As you are likely aware, our State leaders are struggling to devise a funding package that could prevent service cuts and keep fares affordable. These efforts must succeed. But the passage of even the most comprehensive package would fail to cover the newest budget gap estimates--placing New York City at risk of losing more bus service and 24-hour subway service. This 24-hour service is particularly crucial to late-night workers, individuals who are often struggling to hang on to the lowest rung of the employment ladder.

New York City is hardly alone. Transit systems with a total of 22 million daily riders across the nation face major service reductions and fare hikes because of significant funding shortfalls.

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In St. Louis, the Metro system eliminated 2,300 stops across the region on March 30th and as a result, many workers can no longer get to their jobs. In Chicago, fares increased on January 1st, the second time in three years. In Denver, Colorado, Columbia, South Carolina in Gary, Indiana in Albuquerque, New Mexico, in Seattle, Washington, and at least 80 more cities, fare increases, service cuts--and often both--are scheduled or have already taken place.

Even more troubling, these reductions are continuing in the wake of major transit ridership increases across the country. Last year, transit ridership increased four percent, with 10.7 billion rides overall. This is an increase of 38 percent since 1995--levels not seen since 1956, according to the American Public Transportation Association (APTA).

The need for emergency Federal operating funding is compelling. Transit jobs are not new jobs that must be created; they already exist. Federal funding would have an immediate impact, preserving thousands of jobs and possibly restoring already dismissed workers to their positions. Furthermore, these are the "greenest" of jobs, since mass transit helps reduce congestion and emissions that cause illness and global warming.

The stimulus package your Administration championed includes \$6.9 billion for transit capital projects. These are vital if we are to rebuild crumbling transit facilities and expand service to new communities. And each billion in capital spending can create 20,000 jobs or more, according to the APTA. But what good are these projects if there are no longer funds available to operate the buses or rail lines?

In its original stimulus package, the House supplied nearly \$2 billion in operating funding for transit. Unfortunately, the proposal was not adopted. It is time to revisit that decision and to save transit, save jobs and support our nation's economy.

The Administration has assisted automobile companies in recent days in an effort to preserve jobs and protect a vital industry. Meanwhile, Americans are more dependent on mass transit now than ever before. Literally hundreds of thousands of individuals depend on transit for their jobs and it is imperative that they receive assistance as well.

I know that your Administration will give this critical issue the consideration it deserves and on behalf of all New Yorkers, we look forward to working together with you to overcome the challenges that are ahead.

Very truly yours,



William C. Thompson, Jr.