



Testimony of

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Metropolitan Transportation Authority

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Good morning, Chairman Hemmerdinger, Acting Executive Director Williams and MTA Board members.

Earlier this month, I joined the NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign, TWU Local 100, Transportation Alternatives, the Women's City Club and the Council of Senior Center and Services in a letter that urged the MTA not to shut token booths and eliminate station agents.

We wrote you because this would be a service cut that affects riders – women, older people and everyone else who wants the safest ride possible on our subways.

Riders depend on agents to act as the “eyes and ears” of the system. It is human nature: those who are watched, behave better. By their very presence, station agents prevent fare-beating, vandalism and worse crimes.

Station agents also act in emergencies – thousands of times a year. Agents can reach Command Center instantly. And they are the quickest way to reach emergency services – fire, EMS, the police – in the subways.

In fact, the MTA tells us, “When you see something, say something.” And it has even posted signs in many stations that say, “Report any immediate concerns to the Station Agent.” But if there is no station agent, where will riders go?

Agents also make traveling the subways much easier. They assist riders through service gates, help lost children and help with the vending machines.

And they give directions. Last year, New York City had 47 million tourists, including more than 9 million foreign tourists. We want them to take the subway. But we want to make sure they are safe.

The MTA wants to have it both ways by claiming it is not really reducing direct service. But what else do station agents do?

And by claiming that every station will still have 24-hour coverage, even though passengers won't be able to reach many of the remaining open booths without leaving the station altogether, you lose credibility as well.

The MTA also has argued that this is a budget decision. But, in 2009, it indicates savings of just \$3.1 million with this program, and \$12.4 million in 2010. While it makes sense to look for imaginative ways to save money, this is not a smart way to do it.

Finally, riders will pay a half-billion dollars more in higher fares as part of the bail-out. While the MTA also says that the State agreed to this cut, riders certainly didn't.

Closing booths and reducing the number of agents would jeopardize rider safety. I urge you to abandon this foolhardy plan.