

Regional Bus: What Is It?

Regional bus is one of the recommendations of the Ravitch Commission, which was created by Governor David Paterson last year to identify ways to fund and reform the MTA (see back).

In 2008, the MTA consolidated the management of New York City Transit's bus division, MTA Bus, and Long Island Bus into a Regional Bus Authority as a cost saving move. Subject to action by the State Legislature, this authority could take on **full financial responsibility** for Westchester's Bee-Line Bus and Nassau County's Long Island Bus.

Bee-Line, which serves 32 million riders annually, faces fiscal and operational constraints. Westchester County and New York State both support the system with annual appropriations that can **fluctuate year to year**, adding a level of uncertainty that makes service planning difficult.

At times, county and state have been unable to increase support to the system. Between 2002 and 2004, rising costs forced Bee-Line to propose fare hikes or service cuts every year, with a large fare increase taking effect in 2003. Funding has been relatively stable since, but more revenue would allow Bee-Line to provide a higher level of service, with more frequent service, newer buses and innovations like bus rapid transit.

Bee-Line took a step towards integrating with the region's bus network in 2007 by accepting MetroCard. Regional bus could be the logical next step, bringing with it more predictable and higher funding for Bee-Line, and better coordinated service between Bee-Line and New York City Transit.

Regional Bus Authority



“...It is time to rethink the way that bus service is delivered and paid for in the metropolitan region. As a consequence the Commission recommends that State legislation be enacted to create a new MTA subsidiary - the Regional Bus Authority, as the single entity responsible for bus service in the metropolitan region. The Commission's recommendations on funding take account of this view that bus services, in both the City and in the counties, should be enhanced and financial resources be targeted more equitably to accomplish this objective.”

-Ravitch Commission report

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The Ravitch Commission Report

New York's Plan to Save and Reform the MTA

In December 2008, a state commission appointed by Governor David Paterson and led by former MTA board chair Richard Ravitch released its final report, recommending strategies to fund MTA essential capital projects and operating needs and mitigate the MTA's calamitous financial situation.

Incorporating comments from eight public hearings and from meetings with elected officials, transportation policy experts, MTA executives, and State budget officials, the Ravitch Commission produced a number of recommendations addressing the MTA's operating and capital needs, fare policy, new funding sources, regional transit needs, governance, and transparency. Six of the most important ones are below:

REPORT TO GOVERNOR DAVID A. PATERSON

From the
Commission on Metropolitan
Transportation Authority Financing

December 2, 2008

Richard Ravitch, Chairman
Laura L. Anglin
Bernard Beal
Kevin Burke
Robert Catell
Douglas Durst
Peter Goldmark

Denis Hughes
Father Joseph McShane
Mysore Nagaraja
Mark Page
Steven Polan
Elliot G. Sander
Kim Vaccari

1. New Payroll Tax In the MTA Region

Institute a payroll tax of 0.33% on employers in the 12-county MTA district, generating \$1.5 billion annually. This money would fill the hole in the MTA's 2009 budget, staving off most or all service cuts and reducing the planned fare hike. Afterwards it would be dedicated to capital projects only.

2. Tolls on the East and Harlem River Bridges

An MTA takeover of New York City's East River and Harlem River Bridges and an imposition of electronic, cashless tolls would generate an estimated \$600 million in annual revenue.

3. Improvements to Regional Bus Service

Implementation of Bus Rapid Transit in both NYC and its suburbs, and creation of a Regional Bus Authority (see other side) would lead to better bus service throughout the region.

4. Establishment of Regular Fare Increases

Produce a regular schedule for fare increases. Fare increases that are no higher than inflation and at least 2 years apart would not require the MTA to hold public hearings. (TSTC and other transit advocates oppose this recommendation.)

5. Strengthen MTA Governance

Give full executive authority to the MTA Board Chair, who has more political independence than the CEO (the MTA operated this way until 2005), and mandate qualifications for MTA Board Members.

6. Increase Transparency and Accountability

Post online all NYC Independent Budget Office and state comptroller reports pertaining to the MTA, and regularly update capital project budgets.

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