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Gale A. Brewer, Borough President

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**Gale A. Brewer, Manhattan Borough President
Testimony on Proposed MTA Fare Increases**

My name is Gale A. Brewer and I am the Manhattan Borough President. I am here tonight to relay my concern regarding the MTA's proposed fare hikes as well as other issues of service and reliability.

On the fare hikes: riders should not be paying more for less.

Our city's transit system is several years into a downward spiral. We use this term, downward spiral, because when people begin to expect worse service, ridership decreases, and then revenue decreases, and that makes it even harder to fund the system and fix the problems.

The Fast Forward plan has a lot of the right ideas, but the light at the end of the tunnel seems to be many years away. Our commutes have gotten longer and less reliable, forcing thousands of riders to flee for the more reliable, but also more expensive, ride-hail services offered by Uber, Lyft, and so on. Charging more for MTA service that hasn't markedly improved will just make that downward spiral steeper. Yet taxing ride-hailing services does not provide revenue at the scale needed to meaningfully close the MTA's budget gaps.

Congestion pricing has always been the most feasible source of revenue at a scale that would truly help solve the problem – potentially around \$1.5 billion, according to the FixNYC plan. We should pursue this – not more self-destructive and frankly unfair fare hikes. We should all be making this case as the new Democratic State Senate Majority takes office.

On the eve of yet another fare increase, I once again call on the MTA to become a transparent, reliable, and trustworthy partner of the city. First, you must pursue a program of aggressive cost-cutting in areas that do not affect basic services, including restructuring of borrowing costs; second, you must under all circumstances avoid raising the single-ride and Access-A-Ride fares which affect some of our city's most vulnerable residents; third, open your books to independent public review and analysis of capital and operating costs. Lastly, you should more closely examine the best practices of other public systems to improve outcomes and look for savings by prioritizing improvements that will return higher revenues in the short and long term.

An example of this last point is the M96 bus service in Manhattan. We recently learned that the MTA intends to renege on its promise to upgrade the M96 to Select Bus Service. Just last year

the agency agreed with the City to implement a "bus forward" plan that would create 2-3 new Select Bus routes each year going forward.

Only a few months after making that promise, the MTA deferred the upgrades to at least 2021 without consulting the city or announcing the change in plans. Instead, the decision was buried in hundreds of pages of financial documents. This is not an example of full and trustworthy partnership.

The planned upgrades to the M96, set to begin its rollout in 2019, were a long time coming. My office has continually fielded complaints from riders about its poor service, and the route itself has lost riders every year since 2013.

The MTA told my office that SBS is being deferred due to budget constraints as well as their borough-wide route redesigns.

But neither of these reasons explains the delay to the M96 SBS upgrade. The route, one of the shortest in the city, would be inexpensive to upgrade, at a cost of just \$1.8 million additional operating dollars; and this is for an agency with a multi-billion dollar annual operating budget. And furthermore, the Manhattan bus route redesign will not substantially alter the M96 route. The stated reasons just don't apply to the M96.

If we're going to reverse the MTA's downward spiral, we can't cannibalize low-cost, high-impact improvements that would restore confidence in the system and get people back onto the buses and trains. In the end, there is no acceptable reason to delay the M96 SBS upgrade and both riders and the MTA will suffer for it.

President Byford has promised to do everything in his power to avoid service cuts. However, the M96 postponement is a de facto service cut that will delay and inconvenience the 14,000 daily riders who depend on its subpar service.

Just before Thanksgiving, my office, along with the offices of Council Members Ayala, Kallos, Powers, and Rosenthal, wrote to President Byford and Acting Chairman Ferrer requesting the MTA revise their decision to defer the M96 upgrade to SBS. I am reiterating that request to President Byford and the full board.

With respect, New Yorkers are smart enough to understand that the MTA is in a crunch. We can make some sacrifices for better service – and in fact, many of us already have, dealing with station closures, weekend service suspensions, reliability failures, and plenty of fare hikes already. But you can't ask New Yorkers to put up with another fare hike when it comes with service cuts that will just make the MTA's long-run problem of falling ridership worse. Restoring the M96 SBS upgrade is an easy way to send a message to New Yorkers that the MTA hasn't given up on improving service.

Thank you.