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Gale A. Brewer, Borough President

Testimony of Manhattan Borough President Gale A. Brewer Given to the Transportation Committee Hearing of the New York City Council on Improving the MTA's Subway System

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My name is Gale Brewer and I am the Manhattan Borough President. Thank you, Chair Rodriguez, for the opportunity to testify at today's hearing on ways to improve the MTA.

We are all aware of the service delays and disruptions caused by derailments, signal problems, track fires, equipment breakdowns and overcrowding. In the last couple of weeks, we've experienced a fire on the tracks at the 145th street station that left 9 injured and thousands delayed and derailments on the 'B,' 'D,' and 'Q' trains that similarly resulted in injuries and system-wide delays.

Subway delays have increased by 250 percent in the last five years, from 28,000 to 70,000 per month. Subway cars formerly traveled an average of 200,000 miles before they broke down in 2010; now they only make it 120,000 miles. Only two thirds of subway trains make it to their destination on or near schedule, a decline from 80 percent in 2012.

The signal systems pose a major challenge. All but one use the block signaling system in place since 1904. Recently, my office requested an IBO study to look into the MTA's record of repairs and upgrades. The results were discouraging.

The IBO found that 19 out of 33 signal upgrade and repair projects in the MTA's previous two capital plans were completed behind schedule or are still pending and behind schedule. In the current MTA capital plan, 14 signal projects had been scheduled to begin by the end of 2017, but eight of these are already delayed. Former MTA Chair Thomas Prendergast recently told The New York Times that at the current pace it would take 50 years to replace the old signal system.

In response to this study, Albany has pointed out its unprecedented level of commitment to fund the MTA's current capital plan, which includes \$2.1 billion allocated for signal improvements. However, the State has not actually appropriated the dedicated funding required for the current five-year capital plan, denying the MTA the predictability it needs to plan and execute capital maintenance and improvement work more quickly and efficiently. And, frankly, the capital plan itself is not aggressive enough to meet our dire need for repairs and upgrades.

Since there seems to be continued confusion on this front, let's be clear that Albany, and not City Hall, holds primary responsibility for the MTA. The City should contribute as much as it can afford, help lead planning and public outreach, and work closely with state and regional partners through the MTA. The recent disagreements between the Mayor and the Governor only worsen outcomes for the public.

I encourage the MTA to look at all proposals on the table to help address the problem and provide immediate relief. TWU Local 100 has recently put out a 10-point plan to help improve MTA service that would involve more frequent servicing of signals and subway cars. While signal upgrades continue, this approach could reduce breakdowns and improve service.

For long term solutions, we need to find ways to get the MTA needed resources. I stood with Mayor de Blasio yesterday in support of his proposal to enact an income tax surcharge on our wealthiest that will generate nearly \$800 million a year for the MTA. Such an increase could bolster needed infrastructure upgrades, while also helping fund another proposal I support—providing half priced MetroCards for low-income New Yorkers.

I have been an early proponent of the Move NY Plan. I believe it is still the best proposal to raise new revenue. If dedicated to critical upgrades of subway infrastructure, these monies would speed system recovery.

We could also increase the payroll mobility tax. In 2009, the MTA created a new revenue stream to fill the gap in its 2010-2014 Capital Plan through the creation of a mobility tax. The tax applies to all workers who are required to withhold New York State income tax from wages; and whose payroll expense exceeds \$312,500 in any calendar quarter.

Another option is for the State to increase the gas tax. With gasoline prices still low, such an increase could be made more palatable by dedicating revenue to commute rail and regional transit services. States with avowedly fiscally conservative leaders, including Georgia and Utah, have already taken advantage of lower crude oil prices to raise gasoline taxes and invest in infrastructure.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. I look forward to working with the Mayor, the Governor, the TWU and DC37 workers, and the MTA to address the needs, create the dedicated, long-term funding, and restore the city's 113 year old mass transit system to a safe and reliable condition. Our constituents and our visitors expect and deserve this, and it is our responsibility to work together to get it done.