Statement from Mark Lesko to the Metropolitan Transit Authority
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Farmingville, NY - To MTA Chairman Jay Walder, MTA Board Members, and Long Island Rail Road President Helena Williams:

I thank you for holding the hearing tonight in Suffolk County so you can hear directly from the people who will be impacted by the MTA's proposed service cuts to the Long Island Rail Road.

I am strongly opposed to service cuts in the Town of Brookhaven and I urge the Metropolitan Transit Authority to rethink plans to cut Long Island Rail Road service. There are several reasons for my opposition.

Service cuts and reductions will jeopardize the future of our region. Since the mid-nineteenth century, the Long Island Rail Road has helped to foster growth and development in the Town of Brookhaven. Today, the Long Island Rail Road is one of the keys to our future as the Town promotes the priority of transit-oriented development. For instance, the Town of Brookhaven, in partnership with Suffolk County and the Town of Islip, is working on an exciting re-development project around the Ronkonkoma train station. However, our ability to create exciting transit-oriented development projects will be severely limited if the LIRR is cutting trains and lines in Suffolk County.

The MTA payroll tax and the proposed MTA cuts have consequences that are clear - the residents of Brookhaven will pay more taxes for less MTA service. The Town paid over $240,000 in 2009 towards the MTA payroll tax and will pay considerably more in 2010. It is unacceptable that the MTA is receiving more money from residents, but is proposing a decrease in services for them.

Finally, and most importantly, the proposed cuts will deeply affect many of the hardworking people I represent. The railroad is utilized by over 23,000 weekday riders and almost 13,000 weekend riders in the Town of Brookhaven. The Ronkonkama Train Station alone services 17,000 riders daily and is the busiest station on the entire Long Island Rail Road System. Cutting and reducing service will result in overcrowding and will leave many people without a way to get to work.

The east end's state delegation has initiated legislation to create a Peconic Bay Transportation Authority, which would replace the Metropolitan Transit Authority in the five eastern towns: Southampton, East Hampton, Riverhead, Southold, and Shelter Island. In light of the recent developments at the MTA, I am intrigued by the idea of Brookhaven joining a Peconic Bay Transportation Authority to best serve the transportation needs of the town.

When the MTA experiences financial problems it is too often the case that the customer is the one who gets hurt in the end. I sincerely hope you can formulate a creative solution to your fiscal problems that does not include service cuts and reductions for the benefit of my constituents and Long Island's future.

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