



Testimony of Roland Lewis, President and CEO

On Congestion Pricing

METROPOLITAN WATERFRONT ALLIANCE

Before the New York City Council, City Hall

Monday, March 24, 2008

Good evening and thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony.

The Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance supports the Congestion Pricing proposal because it is critical to help our city and region lessen its dependence on the automobile and the attendant traffic that plagues us with congestion, unhealthy air quality and unpredictable travel times that drive up the cost of doing business here too high.

We are excited by Council Speaker Quinn's effort to develop a citywide ferry system for the reasons described below. We also recognize that the success of this mode of transit also depends on the allocation of public operating subsidies in order to keep the fares affordable to the general public and competitive with other mass transport options.

Without such an operating subsidy this every important mode of travel would not be feasible.

MWA supports the dedication of the funding generated by congestion pricing to support and improve mass transit, and most especially, ferry transit which we believe will be the wave of the future for transportation in our region. Congestion pricing translates into mass transit investment. And in the case of waterborne transit, that investment will yield great dividends for a healthier environment and a reliable and enjoyable form of transportation we also eases the crunch on the roads and our rails. Mayor Bloomberg and Council Speaker Quinn with PlaNYC dedicates \$40 million toward ferry transportation. These funds will go a long way to creating a robust addition to the metropolitan area transit system adding some or all of the following:

- 10 new boats to support service from the South Shore of Staten Island (3), the Rockaways and JFK Airport (3), and expanded East River and Upper Bay Service for Bay Ridge, Red Hook, Williamsburg, Greenpoint, Long Island City, and Astoria (4). Total = \$20 million
- \$6 million dollars will buy us twenty new and improved ferry landings in all of these communities, plus bus stop shelters at ferry terminals, and other amenities passengers need during cold and wet weather.
- \$4 million dollars will help us connect the existing system of buses and subways to better integrate with ferries, including Metro Card readers so that a passenger can transfer seamlessly from a boat to a bus or a train
- \$5 million dollars will help us create a new Biodiesel fuel dock that public and private ferries can use, and in the process help us achieve a number of the Mayor's goals for clean air and reduced emissions from what is now almost an entirely diesel powered fleet.
- \$5 million dollars will help the group of nearly 50 privately owned ferries now operating to buy fuel at lower cost, even the same discount rate that the Staten Island Ferry gets, so that the public service these businesses provide in ensuring our mobility is matched by some public contribution.

Ferries make great practical sense for the everyday commuter and economic sense for our public transportation system. For instance:

- A trip from Atlantic Avenue in Brooklyn to Exchange Place in Jersey City would take you 54 minutes by car; whereas by ferry, the travel time for the same trip would be cut in half, saving a commuter almost an hour each day in round trip travel times.
- Similarly, traveling from Red Hook to Wall Street, which takes 45 minutes by car, is a mere 10 minutes by ferry. That's a 78% reduction in travel time, and additionally, an extraordinary cut in VMT (vehicle miles traveled), even when compared to bus and subway routes.

Water transit is still the only mode of transit that is not subsidized like other modes of transit.

A functioning ferry system will help all of us in normal times, but when our city is facing a crisis, ferries have and will once again serve as a transportation safety net for the region. Over the last six years we have seen this limited ferry system come to the rescue of New Yorkers three times as the single and only mode that kept New York moving.

On September 11, when transit service was halted and gridlock clogged our streets, only the waterways helped ferry more than 250,000 people to safety, out of lower Manhattan and to opposite shores in Brooklyn, and Jersey City.

In August 2003, when the electric grid failed in much of the northeastern United States, only the waterways helped ferry people from their workplaces in Manhattan to their homes across the East River in Queens and Brooklyn, and across the Upper Bay and Hudson in Staten Island, Jersey City, Hoboken and elsewhere.

Then again in 2006, when the Transit strike stopped all train and bus service, our ferry

network played a critical role in keeping our economy moving, as new services were created overnight in Long Island City and in South Brooklyn to help get people to work.

Despite the tremendous and positive role our waterways have played in these three episodes and could play to alleviate overcrowded roads and subways, we have thus far failed to integrate water transit into our larger transportation strategy. It is a wise investment. As opposed to rail and roads, the water connects us free of charge. In many cases ferries will offer a more cost-effective and time-efficient mode and can serve a much greater portion of our mobility needs than they now do. We can start to cure this problem with a modest investment in ferry transit. The Mayor's \$40 million generated through congestion pricing as proposed in PlaNYC would be a solid start.

Congestion pricing will be a win-win-win-win for our city and region:

- A healthier environment as we will have fewer cars on the road.
- Better mass transit including a more robust ferry system.
- A better business environment as goods and people can move around more efficiently, and,
- Perhaps most important, a greater ferry system that can serve us and keep us safer when calamity strikes again.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on this very important issue, and all of us at MWA look forward to working with the Council to create a more effective and affordable water transit system.

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