



Testimony of

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NEW YORK CITY TRANSIT COMMITTEE
Metropolitan Transportation Authority

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Good morning, Chairman Frasca and MTA Board members.

Earlier this month, Albany lawmakers passed a \$1.8 billion funding package intended to prevent service cuts and layoffs. Riders will pay a half-billion dollars more in higher fares.

But here we are, facing a service cut anyway. Forty-one station booths, another 158 station agents gone, through attrition. We'll be paying more for less.

Riders like me depend on agents to act as the "eyes and ears" of the system. It is human nature: those who are watched, behave better. By their very presence, station agents prevent fare-beating, vandalism and worse crimes.

Station agents also act in emergencies – thousands of times a year. Agents can reach Command Center instantly. And they are the quickest way to reach emergency services – fire, EMS, the police – in the subways.

In fact, the MTA tells us, "When you see something, say something." And it has even posted signs in many stations that say, "Report any immediate concerns to the Station Agent." But if there is no station agent, where will riders go?

Agents also make traveling the subways much easier. Agents help the mother or father get through the service gate with their child's stroller. They help middle-school students as they navigate the subways for the first time. They help older people and persons who are disabled.

And they help with the vending machines and provide directions. Last year, New York City had 47 million tourists, including more than 9 million foreign tourists. We want them to take the subway. But we want to make sure they are safe.

The MTA wants to have it both ways by claiming it is not really reducing service. But what else do station agents do? They do nothing else but provide service.

This agency has been criticized that it is not upfront with the public. But the MTA loses credibility when it claims that this is not a service cut. And by claiming that every station will still have 24-hour coverage, even though passengers won't be able to reach many of the remaining open booths without leaving the station altogether, you lose credibility as well.

The value of stations agents cannot be measured by a count of "customer interactions" or transactions, as the Authority has suggested at times. Instead, it must be measured by the feeling of safety they help bring to the wide variety of riders you serve. Closing booths and reducing the number of agents would jeopardize rider safety. I urge you to abandon this foolhardy plan.