



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE COMPTROLLER
SCOTT M. STRINGER

April 20, 2018

Darryl C. Irick
President, MTA Bus Operations
2 Broadway
New York, NY 10004

Dear President Irick:

As you know, my office has been an unwavering advocate for our bus system and strong proponent of increased investment. To this end, we have worked tirelessly to offer recommendations to improve the system – from better aligning bus routes to emerging job centers outside Manhattan, to expanding off-peak service for the growing number of New Yorkers who work outside the 9-to-5 workday, to improving City enforcement of dedicated bus lanes.

Today, I am writing to express my concern regarding a critical piece of our bus infrastructure -- the MTA's Select Bus Service (SBS) system, and specifically the functionality of its fare payment machines and Reduced-Fare MetroCards. It has come to my attention that fare payment kiosks are often out-of-order, that the proof-of-payment tickets they produce are frequently faded and illegible, and that Reduced-Fare riders have had difficulty with bus transfers and other transactions. Off-board fare collection is intended to ease and expedite boarding and speed up bus travel. It is important that these purported benefits are provided consistently and that they extend to all bus riders, regardless of age or disability.

To further understand these challenges, earlier this month my office conducted a survey of 115 Reduce-Fare riders along 12 of the city's 15 SBS routes. The survey found that 40 percent of those riders had experienced difficulty obtaining a ticket at a fare payment machine. Among these riders, 77 percent reported that their Reduced-Fare MetroCard had not worked on multiple occasions in the last year. Over 15 percent reported issues on more than five occasions.

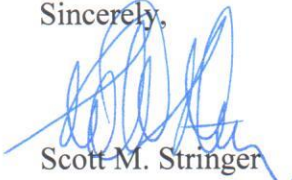
Surveyed riders identified a number of SBS stops where they had experienced issues with fare payment machines and Reduced Fare MetroCards. They included the corners of Nostrand Avenue and Avenue U in Brooklyn, Webster Avenue and East Fordham Road in the Bronx, East 86th Street and First Avenue in Manhattan, and Jamaica Avenue and Woodhaven Boulevard in Queens. In certain instances, these riders expressed issues with their Reduced Fare MetroCards specifically. In other instances, the problem was with a malfunctioning fare payment machine more generally. At West 23rd Street and Eighth Avenue, for instance, riders of the SBS M23 reported that fare payment machines had been out-of-order for weeks, forbidding them from obtaining tickets before boarding.

We are committed to reliable, fast, frequent, accessible, and affordable bus service for all New Yorkers. And, as the attached report underscores, we have a number of ideas that we believe could help the MTA to improve SBS service in particular. In this spirit of quality service, sustained progress, and strong oversight, I respectfully request that you provide my office with the following information by May 11, 2018:

- Please describe the maintenance protocol for SBS fare payment machines. How often are machines inspected? Beyond in-person inspections, how is the MTA alerted to issues with fare payment machines? Does the MTA receive automated alerts when a machine is not functioning as intended?
- Please provide a list of all SBS fare payment machines, by ID number. For each machine, provide: a) the number of times they have been out-of-service in the last year, and b) the length of time they were out of service in each instance.
- Please describe issues that have been identified regarding Reduced-Fare MetroCards. How have these issues been addressed? How many Reduced-Fare MetroCard related complaints has the MTA received via its Customer Feedback Database in the last year?

Thank you in advance for your timely response.

Sincerely,



Scott M. Stringer
New York City Comptroller

c: Andy Byford, President, MTA New York City Transit