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

December 26, 2018

Steven Banks
Commissioner
NYC Human Resources Administration/Department of Social Services
150 Greenwich Street, 40th Floor
New York, NY 10007

Dear Commissioner Banks:

I am writing to inquire about the implementation of the Fair Fares program, which is due to begin on January 1, 2019. The provision of half-price MetroCards to low-income New Yorkers is a long-overdue reform and I applaud the Administration's investment in making transit more affordable for low-income commuters. I do, however, have questions about the structure, eligibility criteria, and outreach efforts that will be used to guide the program.

Based on the limited information made public to date on the Fair Fares program, my office's understanding is that eligible riders will only be able to purchase half-price, unlimited ride 7-Day and 30-Day MetroCards, *not* pay-per-ride passes. Given the high cost of these unlimited passes, even at half-price, I am concerned that many New Yorkers below the poverty line will not be able to afford them.

The last time New York City Transit conducted an in-depth ridership survey, it found that families earning less than $25,000 were responsible for only 15 percent of all 30-Day MetroCard purchases, but 35 percent of all single ride MetroCards purchases. Clearly, low-income riders are heavily dependent on these lower cost options. As you know, the existing Reduced-Fare MetroCard program allows seniors and disabled riders to obtain single-ride discounts, and yet the current plan would exclude low-income riders eligible for Fair Fares from the same option. That would seem to make little sense if the point of Fair Fares is to make transit more affordable for all New Yorkers living below the poverty line.

I am also interested in learning more about the administration of this program and request information on the following issues:

- Please describe in detail the eligibility criteria the Human Resources Administration (HRA) will use in awarding Fair Fares Metrocards. Are there specific groups that will be prioritized at the outset? What is your timeline for making it available to all eligible New Yorkers as expeditiously as possible?
- As you know, not everyone who qualifies for benefits programs available through HRA actually enrolls in them, and many benefit programs exclude recent immigrants and other individuals in need from enrollment. Is there any path for individuals not already enrolled

in HRA's system to apply for and receive a Fair Fares Metrocard? How will we assure that recent immigrants can take full advantage of the program?

- Finally, please detail all advertising and outreach efforts to date and in the pipeline to raise awareness regarding Fair Fares, including budget and staffing allocation. With only days to go before the debut of the program, it seems that little if any investment has been made in making the public aware of Fair Fares' availability and benefits.

As we both agree, Fair Fares is an essential anti-poverty program and it is important that it is implemented successfully. As such, I look forward to your timely answers to each inquiry detailed above by January 14, 2019.

Sincerely,

Scott M. Stringer
New York City Comptroller

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