



Testimony of Rachael Fauss, Reinvent Albany

Before MTA Finance Committee

February 25, 2019

Recommendations

Move MTA Fiscal Year to Better Align with NYS Budget

Release Budget in Open Data

Good afternoon. I am Rachael Fauss, Senior Research Analyst for Reinvent Albany. We advocate for more transparent and accountable state government, including for state authorities like the MTA.

I am here today to:

1. Ask you to move the MTA's fiscal year to better align with the state budget calendar. We thank MTA Board Member Veronica Vanterpool for advancing this common-sense solution;
2. Ask you to adopt additional measures to improve the MTA's budget process, including open data for all MTA budget materials such as the PDF documents presented today by releasing them in CSV, spreadsheet form; and
3. Note our opposition to the current proposal from the Governor's 30-day amendments to create a 6-person "expert panel" to determine congestion tolls and approve MTA operating and capital budgets. The amendment does not say who will appoint this panel, and during the budget is not the time to make major changes to redistribute power over the MTA's governance structure. Governance changes should be discussed after the budget when they may be fully and thoroughly discussed by MTA stakeholders and the public.

Regarding your current fiscal year, your vote on fare and toll increases this week is a shot in the dark at a problem that you can't fully see. The solution here is easy - turn on the lights, and give yourself more information about what your budget will be by moving your fiscal year start date to after the state budget is adopted (by March 31st). Your current budget ignorance is significant: whether or not the MTA will have an additional \$15 billion from congestion pricing for its 2020-2024 capital plan has huge implications for much the MTA can spend on future operating and capital programs.

The resolution before you would move the budget to a July 1st start date, beginning in July 2020, with the MTA would adopting a one-time 6-month budget to adjust to this new time-frame from Jan to June 2020. We ask that you consider the following issues in evaluating this proposal:

1. Should this change could be made further in the future, when potential costs related to this one-time shift can be mitigated, such as when there is no planned fare and toll increase? There is plenty of time to consider how to make best to make this change, which we support.
2. Has the MTA examined what cost savings could be produced by this change? For example, the MTA staff will not need to re-forecast the budget or issue revenue anticipation notes, which could offset any one-time costs.
3. If not this proposal, what other solutions do MTA staff have to make a more sensible budget process? For example, we and other groups have met with MTA staff beginning in 2012 about releasing the MTA's budget in open data, yet at a State Senate hearing last week, we were disappointed to hear that there was no plan for opening up MTA budget data.

Thank you for your consideration.