



**Testimony of Rachael Fauss, Reinvent Albany
Before Finance Committee of the MTA
Regarding Transparency of Budget Information**

December 3, 2018

Recommendation: Please put budget online in open data format.

Good morning 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.

Former Chairman Lhota and New York City Transit President Andy Byford have both noted the importance of the MTA being a more transparent and accountable institution in order to restore its credibility, which is particularly crucial given the immense financial challenges that it faces. While this meeting is an opportunity for greater public discussion of the MTA's 2019 budget, we would like to highlight another way for the MTA to instill public confidence: putting all of the MTA's budget data online in an open format.

Currently, the MTA publishes its budget information in PDF file format form, which is not readable by spreadsheet software. This means members of the public need to "scrape" or convert the pdf document into a spreadsheet form or hand-type endless columns of numbers. This makes it very hard for the public to check the MTA's math

and gain real insights from MTA budget reports. Data in PDF format is not open government, it is fake transparency.

Back in 2012 and again in 2014, Reinvent Albany and members of the NYC Transparency Working Group asked the MTA in writing to make all tables of financial data provided in the board books available in both pdf and CSV spreadsheet form, as part of further compliance with Executive Order 95 that created the NYS Open Data website.

We had at least three meetings with senior MTA leadership, including Bob Foran to discuss making the budget machine readable, and MTA open data initiatives. We have lauded the MTA for its real-time travel data feeds that have fostered an explosion in 3rd party subway and bus travel apps. However, it has been six years since we asked the MTA to truly open its books and nothing further has happened. This is not acceptable, particularly since Governor Cuomo's [NY Open Budget website](#) presents all tables in the state budget in a machine readable, CSV format, in some areas going back all the way to 1994 -- all in downloadable form. The code of this platform is available in an open source format.

We are asking today that the Board work with the staff to renew the MTA's focus on open data by (1) putting its budget information online in CSV spreadsheet form, and (2) creating an open budget website for the MTA for its capital and expense budgets and financial information.

Thank you for your consideration.