

**Citizens Budget Commission • Partnership for New York City
Regional Plan Association • Reinvent Albany**

August 04, 2025

The Honorable Kathy Hochul
Governor of the State of New York
New York State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Re: Please veto A4873/S4091, prohibiting MTA use of one-person train operation

Dear Governor Hochul:

We write to urge you to veto A4873/S4091, which would prohibit the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) from using one-person train operation (OPTO)—the global norm used by the vast majority of subway authorities across the world—by requiring the presence of a conductor on all trains over two cars long operated by the New York City Transit Authority.¹

This bill would require the MTA to end its current, limited use of OPTO and stop the MTA from using OPTO to improve subway efficiency and/or service as transit technology is modernized.

Specifically, we recommend you veto for the following reasons:

1. *OPTO can provide better service at a lower cost.* CBC estimated that using OPTO systemwide could save \$442 million annually, which could be reinvested to close the MTA's structural operating budget gap or improve service for riders.²

Despite fully installed communications-based train control (CBTC) that allows the 7 and L trains to drive autonomously, both an operator and a conductor remain on board.³ Future technology and rolling stock improvements will further reduce the dependence on conductors, yet this legislation requires their presence in perpetuity.

2. *The MTA would have to cease using OPTO* on the A, G, M, 5 and all of the shuttle services, costing as much as \$10 million annually.
3. *OPTO is the international norm.* OPTO is used in the world's biggest and highest performing subway systems—including London and Paris—because it allows them to provide quality service at a reduced cost. The MTA's subway and the Port Authority Trans-Hudson (PATH) are the only two transit systems in the U.S., and among a rare handful in the world, that have both a conductor and an operator on their trains. All other heavy rail transit operators in the U.S. utilize OPTO, having train operators drive the train, make announcements, and open and close the doors.

Other legacy U.S. rail transit operators long ago transitioned to OPTO—the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority in 1984, the Chicago Transit Authority in 1998, and the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority in 2012.⁴ Newer systems in Washington, D.C.,

San Francisco, and Atlanta have utilized OPTO since they began operating.⁵ Legacy transit systems outside the U.S. have successfully transitioned to OPTO—Stockholm in 1975, London in 2000, and Paris in 1968, which also began operating driverless trains in 2013.⁶

4. *Leaving operational strategies and decisions to management is the best, most flexible path to high quality service at the lowest cost.* State laws should focus on ensuring agencies are high performing and transparent, and that management is accountable.

We recommend you veto this bill since it would impede the MTA's ability to provide more efficient, reliable, and modern subway service. We strongly support efforts to provide New Yorkers with world-class public transit. This bill does the opposite by raising MTA operating costs and constraining the MTA's ability to implement modern operating methods, adopt new technologies, and provide better service for riders.

Thank you for your consideration of our position. We are available to discuss this issue at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Andrew S. Rein
President
Citizens Budget Commission

Kathryn S. Wylde
President & CEO
Partnership for New York City

Tom Wright
President & CEO
Regional Plan Association

John Kaehny
Executive Director
Reinvent Albany

cc: David Ullman, Deputy Secretary for Transportation

- [1] Mike Palmer, "One Person Train Operation" (Presentation to Toronto Transit Commission Board, March 2015), <https://stevemunro.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/opto-presentation-march-2015-board-meeting-v3-2-1.pdf>.
- [2] Alex Armlovich, *The Track to Fiscal Stability: Operations Reforms for the MTA* (Citizens Budget Commission, May 25, 2021), <https://cbcny.org/research/track-fiscal-stability>.
- [3] Metropolitan Transportation Authority, "Rules & Regulations" (January 2016), www.twulocal100.org/sites/twulocal100.org/files/nyct_rules_regulations_2016_optimized.pdf.
- [4] J. A. Hoess and P. J. Murphy, *Conversion to One-Person Operation of Rapid-Transit Trains* (National Cooperative Transit Research & Development Program, 1986), Report 13, <https://onlinepubs.trb.org/Onlinepubs/nctrp/rpt13/13.pdf>; Mike Palmer, "One Person Train Operation" (Presentation to Toronto Transit Commission Board, March 2015), <https://stevemunro.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/opto-presentation-march-2015-board-meeting-v3-2-1.pdf>; Massachusetts Department of Transportation Rail & Transit Division, "Red Line Single Person Train Operations (SPTO) FAQ" (2011), www.ctps.org/data/calendar/pdfs/2011/6.21_SPTO_Fact_Sheet.pdf.
- [5] Hoess and Murphy (n4).
- [6] Hoess and Murphy (n4); LB Foster, "London Underground Limited – One Person Operation (OPO)" (January 6, 2020), <https://lbfooster.com/case-studies/london-underground-limited-one-person-operation-opo>; RATP Group, "Metro Line 1: a line and its history" (November 28, 2024), www.ratp.fr/en/discover/out-and-about/culture/history-metro-line-1.