



February 11, 2026

Honorable Zohran Mamdani
Mayor, City of New York
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Dear Mayor Mamdani,

At no point since the Great Depression has affordability been so vital to so many New York City residents. Transportation is a critical component of this equation, as [one in five New Yorkers](#) struggles to pay the fare. We write today to urge you to expand the Fair Fares program in this year's city budget. Our expansion proposals, detailed below, will **save over two million New Yorkers up to \$910 per year on their transit costs**, while also cutting commute times for New Yorkers in parts of the city without subway access.

First launched in 2019, Fair Fares offers half-fare subway, bus, and paratransit rides to low-income New Yorkers ages 18-64, and is a crucial lifeline of affordability for over 360,000 currently enrolled individuals. The program began in 2019 with an income limit of 100% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) and was expanded incrementally to 120% in 2023, 145% in 2024, and 150% in 2025, following staunch advocacy from our organizations and partnership with the city and MTA. The City currently allocates just over \$96 million in baseline funding to the Fair Fares program, with an additional \$25 million allocated for FY2026 to address the incremental increase.

As we discussed in more detail in our recently released report, [Universal Affordable Transit for New York](#), no other city program has the power to improve transportation equity – and lives – while simultaneously addressing our city's affordability crisis.

Even if our buses and paratransit become free, millions of struggling New Yorkers will still need to use the subway. This year, over 65% of taps from Fair Fares users were on the subway. Fair Fares also helps riders avoid fare evasion by ensuring fewer riders are unable to pay, and comes as the MTA is about to begin testing new fare gates that will make it much harder to avoid paying. For these reasons, we believe it's time to unlock the full potential of the Fair Fares program with the five program changes:

1. **Expand Fair Fares to 300%** of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) (individual- \$46,950, four-person household- \$96,450). This would allow an estimated 2.1 million New Yorkers to participate in the program at 300% of the FPL.

Additional Cost beyond the FY26 baseline: ~\$125 - \$155 million

2. **Fully free for households under 150%** of the FPL (individual- \$23,475, four-person household- \$48,225). This would allow for an estimated 1.3 million New



Yorkers to have unlimited access to subway, bus, and paratransit service.

Additional Cost beyond the FY26 baseline: ~\$150 - \$175 million

3. **Expand Fair Fares with half-priced fares on MTA Express Buses and CityTickets** on the LIRR and Metro-North railroads within New York City, drastically reducing commute times for tens of thousands of New Yorkers in subway deserts.
4. **Automatic Enrollment** of qualified households to improve the current enrollment rate. Currently, only around a third of eligible households are enrolled, a dismal amount. According to [independent research](#), automatic enrollment could boost program uptake by an additional 33%.
5. **Close program loopholes**, such as on Access-a-Ride for qualifying seniors, who currently pay half fare as program participants until age 64 and then pay full fare at age 65.

Recent research [found that](#) Fair Fares' current eligibility threshold is lower than that of most similar programs across the United States, despite our highest-in-the-nation transit ridership and infamous cost of living. **Yet City Hall can make affordability a reality in this year's budget by transforming Fair Fares.**

Thank you so much for your careful consideration and attention to the needs of New Yorkers. We are available to meet with you at your convenience.

Respectfully signed,

David Jones, President & CEO, **Community Service Society**

Betsy Plum, Executive Director, **Riders Alliance**

Lisa Daglian, Executive Director, **Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA (PCAC)**

John Samuelsen, International President, **Transport Workers Union (TWU)**

Tori Newman- Campbell, Legislative Coordinator, **1199 SEIU**

Kate Slevin, Executive Vice President, **Regional Plan Association**

Sara Lind, Co-Executive Director, **Open Plans**

Jeremy Saunders & Alyssa Aguilera, Co-Executive Directors, **VOCAL-NY**

Jean Ryan, President, **Disabled In Action of Metropolitan NY**



Alia Soomro, Deputy Director for NYC Policy, **New York League of Conservation Voters**

Michelle Jackson, Executive Director, **Human Services Council of New York**

Eric McClure, Executive Director, **StreetsPAC**

Lonnie J. Portis, Director of Policy and Legislative Affairs, **WE ACT for Environmental Justice**

Olivia Leirer, Executive Director, **New York Communities for Change**

Wayne Ho, President & CEO of the **Chinese-American Planning Council (CPC)**

Zakiyah Shaakir-Ansari, Co-Executive Director, **Alliance for Quality Education**

Elizabeth Adams, Deputy Director for Public Affairs, **Transportation Alternatives**

Kalilah Moon, Executive Director, **Drive Change**

Daisy Chung, Campaigns Director, **ALIGN: The Alliance for a Greater New York**

Rebecca Bailin, Executive Director, **New Yorkers United for Childcare**

Monifa Bandele, NY Coordinating Committee, **Malcolm X Grassroots Movement**

Stuart Appelbaum, President, **Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union**

Ben Fuller-Googins, Executive Director, **Carroll Gardens Association**

Galloway, Advocacy Manager, **Ali Forney Center**

Rachael Fauss, Senior Policy Advisor, **Reinvent Albany**

Michael Ring, Co-Coordinator, **Transportation Equity Working Group, Downstate NY ADAPT**

Jaeok Kim, interim director of the Greater Justice New York initiative, **Vera Institute of Justice**

Murad Awawdeh, President & CEO, **New York Immigration Coalition**

Jessica Murray, Organizer, **Rise and Resist Elevator Action Group**

Dr. Sharon McLennon Wier, Executive Director, **Center for Independence of the Disabled, New York (CIDNY)**



Christopher Schuyler, Managing Attorney, Disability Justice Program, **New York Lawyers for the Public Interest**

Natasha Elder, Regional Director and Straphangers Campaign Coordinator, **New York Public Interest Research Group**

Jaqi Cohen, Director of Climate and Equity Policy, **Tri-State Transportation Campaign**

Elmer Flores, Statewide Policy & Advocacy Manager, **NEW Pride Agenda**

Will Watts, Deputy Executive Director for Advocacy, **Coalition for the Homeless**

Lorena Kourousias, Executive Director, **Mixteca Organization, Inc.**

Annetta Seecharran, Executive Director, **Chhaya CDC**

Yoon Ji Kim, Interim Executive Director, **MinKwon Center for Community Action**

Helen Strom, Benefits and Homeless Advocacy Director, **Safety Net Project at the Urban Justice Center**

Cc: Honorable Julie Menin
Speaker, New York City Council
City Hall
New York, NY 10007