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February 15, 2023

Hon. Kathy Hochul, Governor
State of New York
NYS Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Hochul,

As you know, your announcement last month regarding proposed housing growth requirements sounded an alarm in many suburban communities throughout the State, including the County of Rockland and my administration. I, like many county executives, have concerns about the State's intent to mandate a 3% increase in residential development and mandatory rezoning around MTA rail stations within MTA-District member communities.

Your budget proposal announcement earlier this month further concerns me, as it relates to your proposal to increase the MTA Payroll Tax to (again) bail out the MTA.

These issues are in addition to Rockland County's already existing concerns about the impact of MTA's congestion pricing proposal on Rockland County commuters. All these concerns are within the context of Rockland County's decades-long \$40 million annual value gap between what we pay to MTA and what we receive in return. Rockland County residents are already faced with the highest level of inequity in the MTA region as evidenced by even [MTA's own analyses](#).

That said, I am specifically writing to you, and to our representatives in the State Legislature, to request Rockland County's exemption from the mandates you have proposed for members of the MTA-District, including those contained in your Housing Compact and in your MTA financial bail-out plan.

The Housing Compact's proposed requirement for MTA-member communities to have 3% housing growth and be required to rezone around rail stations is unreasonable, given Rockland County's specific and unique circumstances, which I am happy to outline below. In tandem with your unveiling of the Compact's proposed mandates, you were quoted as stating, "*Our investments in our world-class commuter rail lines have connected more people to jobs and created more thriving downtowns. That is why it makes sense to build new housing in those same areas. So as part of the Compact, any municipality with a train station will rezone the area within a half-mile of the station to allow for the creation of new housing within the next three years.*"

It has been more than 15 years since MTA made any real investment in Rockland County and MTA has no plans for any future investment here. Rockland County's rail service is more third-world than world-class and it's not even provided by MTA. MTA Metro-North contracts with NJ TRANSIT (NJT) to provide our rail service, which is sub-par, unreliable, and inadequate. Not to mention that Rockland County commuters still do not have a one-seat train ride into Manhattan.

Without transit investments from MTA in Rockland County, increasing housing units by 3% will result in more single occupancy vehicles traveling from Rockland to the Central Business District (CBD), which is counter to everyone's goals and bad for the environment.

This past November, I wrote to the members of the MTA Board and the Traffic Mobility Review Board requesting Rockland County commuters be exempted from the proposed CBD (Congestion Pricing) Tolling Program for these same reasons.

As mentioned, Rockland County suffers a [\\$40 million annual value gap](#) between the value of services and funding provided by the MTA and the contributions of Rockland County residents and businesses to the MTA while other members of the MTA benefit from a surplus of value (they pay less than the value of the services they receive). Even Connecticut receives better and more service from the MTA than Rockland County does.

MTA's lack of investment and "ownership" of its West of Hudson rail service is apparent. It is no secret that Metro-North does not consider itself responsible for the Pascack Valley line trains that serve Rockland County. Metro-North's West of Hudson service is operated via contract with NJT, yet Metro-North has allowed NJT to repeatedly breach its contract without penalty and has provided no funds for capital improvements needed to expand service. MTA has negotiated no improvements from NJT for the Pascack Valley Line rail service schedule since 2007, and – in fact – has allowed NJT to even cut MTA-funded service. Since 2007, Rockland's Pascack Valley line commuters have seen nothing but declining service quality, repeated and permanent service reductions, and increased fares. Metro-North's inability to enforce its operating contract with NJT must be addressed and service on the Pascack Valley line must be improved and expanded before Rockland County residents are asked to pay congestion pricing tolls.

There have been virtually no capital investments in Rockland County. MTA officials often point to Metro-North's heavy investment in its West of Hudson Port Jervis line service and infrastructure. Unfortunately, the Port Jervis line serves just one station in Rockland County and our residents make up less than two percent of the ridership on that line.

I invite you to review MTA's Capital Programs over the past 10+ years and challenge you to find any significant investment in Rockland County. In fact, MTA deferred West of Hudson capital investments that should have been made here years ago – investments recommended by MTA's own 20-Year Needs Assessment. MTA's current 20-Year Needs Assessment and Capital Plan has not identified any potential expansion or enhancement projects for Rockland County. One of MTA's investment principles is to "expand network reach" by connecting "underserved or new communities to education and employment opportunities," yet Rockland County – a well-documented underserved community – continues to get pushed to the back of the line.


I acknowledge that the MTA needs a regular source of money for its Capital Program and the proposed CBD Tolling Program presentations have asserted that investing in an improved mass transit system can help promote equity by providing expanded access to the system. All of this sounds great if Rockland County benefitted from any of those investments.

Rockland County has been seeking equity from the MTA for 35 years. Paying more to the MTA in the form of congestion pricing tolls and increased Payroll Tax (Metropolitan Commuter Transportation Mobility Tax) without any subsequent MTA investment in Rockland County will only increase our value gap exponentially.

Going forward, Rockland County applauds your focus on the importance of the Gateway Project and looks forward to seeing New York State's sincere investment in that vital project. We also look forward to seeing MTA dedicate capital funds to the Bergen Loop portion of the Gateway Project, as well as the passing sidings, yard improvements, rolling stock, and locomotives needed for Metro-North's Pascack Valley line service to expand and improve in tandem with Gateway. These are the minimum investments that must be committed now for Rockland County commuters to someday have a one-seat-ride to Manhattan.

I appreciate your assistance with ensuring that Rockland County is exempt from any mandates for MTA-District members associated with housing growth, rezoning requirements, and increases in MTA Payroll Mobility Taxes. I also appreciate your support of our request for Rockland County commuters be exempt from Congestion Pricing tolls.

Sincerely,



Edwin J. Day
Rockland County Executive

C: Kenneth P. Zebrowski, NYS Assembly - 96th District
John W. McGowan, NYS Assembly - 97th District
Karl Brabenec, NYS Assembly - 98th District
Christopher Eachus, NYS Assembly - 99th District
Bill Weber, NYS Senate - District 38
Pete Harckham, NYS Senate - District 40