



United Transit Leadership Organization

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March 9, 2021

Hon. Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousin
Majority Leader
35th Senatorial District
28 Wells Avenue, Building #3
Yonkers, NY 10701
scousins@nysenate.gov

Hon. Assembly Member Carl Heastie
Majority Leader
83rd Assembly District
1446 East Gun Hill Road
Bronx, NY 10469
Speaker@nyassembly.gov

Dear Senator Stewart-Cousins and Assembly Member Heastie:

We are the United Transit Leadership Organization. We are the labor union representing over a thousand mid-level managers at affiliates of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority. We write to you because the labor relations process between the Authority's subsidiaries and the labor unions representing their employees have completely broken down and because the legal recourse available to the unions is wholly ineffective.

The MTA has used the COVID-19 pandemic as an excuse to cease *all* collective bargaining with the unions. This—~~if~~^{is}, of course, wholly unacceptable and in blatant disregard for the requirements of good faith bargaining set forth in the Taylor Law. Problem is, although we've sought relief from the Public Employment Relations Board, that Board is so underfunded and understaffed that we expect little progress from administrative remedies. As such, we appeal to our elected representatives to restore collective bargaining, to investigate extremely wasteful practices at the MTA and grant to our membership through legislation a benefit otherwise provided to all other unionized employees.

First, we urge the Legislature to take whatever steps are necessary to get the MTA affiliates to the bargaining table. The UTLO's unique role as a union of professional transit managers means that bargaining with it will reveal a host of overlooked efficiencies and savings. Such bargaining, even assuming the type of budget constraints the MTA has claimed, may also result in an economic package that is acceptable to the parties without bursting the state budget while also addressing non-economic issues which have been ignored for a very long time. The budget constraints moreover

should be alleviated by the six billion dollars the MTA is scheduled to receive from the federal government. As a result, all possible pressure should be put on the MTA to move forward with bargaining and relevant committees should immediately investigate the refusal to do so, the wildly exaggerated claims of financial hardship, and the illegal wage freeze recently announced by the MTA's Chief Financial Officer, a freeze with no statutory authority.

Second, we urge the Legislature to investigate the payments and operations of the so-called Transformation Office at the MTA. The MTA is paying millions of dollars annually to several individuals who staff this "office". The office is headed by Chief Transportation Officer Anthony McCord whose published biography includes no transit experience and who is receiving \$325,000.00 each year in taxpayer money. It is UTLO's firm conclusion that the Transformation Office has no significant accomplishments since its establishment and that the office represents a black hole whose gravity pulls in taxpayer money while letting no savings or other taxpayer benefit out. This boondoggle mandates appropriate investigation by the Legislature.

Finally, the UTLO's membership is the only union membership without commuter rail privileges. We anticipate that bills sponsored by Senator James Skoufis and Assembly Member Charles Lavine to add an additional "no fare" provision to Section 1266 of the Public Authorities Law for transit managers to ride the Long Island and Metro North Rail Roads without charge will be shortly introduced. That these essential employees have been denied the right to do so while the MTA has issued, as recently reported in the Journal News, 11,000 free passes to elected officials who have no right whatsoever to such a privilege is an insult to our membership and truly "not fair". Undoubtedly, the MTA will urge the Legislature to refrain from acting in this regard claiming the issue to be one for collective bargaining. This is sheer hypocrisy, however, as Transit Police are employed by the MTA affiliates yet have received this benefit by statute, not by bargaining. Such a claim is also hypocritical in light of the refusal to bargain over *any and all* issues as noted above.

We thank for your time and consideration and hope the issues we raised will be taken up at the earliest possible time.

Sincerely,

Mario Bucceri

Mario Bucceri, President

cc: Senator James Skoufis
Senator Timothy Kennedy
Senator Leroy Comrie
Assembly Member William Magnorelli
Assembly Member Amy Paulin
Assembly Member Charles Lavine